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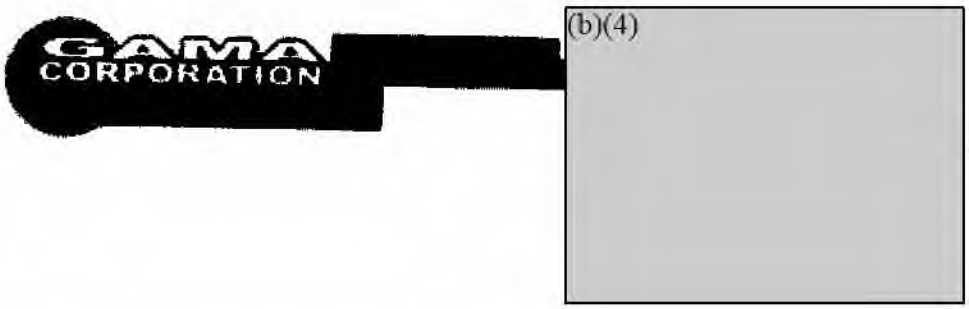

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March 28, 2007

Fighting a War We Don't Control: Iraq, Fall, 2006

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OVERVIEW

I. Purpose. The purpose of this narrative is to present a snapshot of the combat in Iraq in the fall of 2006. Any description is a simplification of reality. No one can write a narrative without organizing the material by applying a frame of reference. My writing is organized around how a soldier does his job.

In September and October of 2006, I spent six weeks visiting eleven units spread from Baghdad to al Qaim, 280 miles to the west. I subsequently went back to Iraq in February of 2007, and will return again in April of 2007. Since March of 2003, I have spent approximately 15 months in Iraq and have embedded with about 40

American and Iraqi battalions.[1]

The serrated nature of descriptions about the fighting in Iraq in large measure is attributable to the secrecy of the official reporting. The military and the CIA have classified more data than in prior wars due to the emergence of the SIPRNet, the classified Internet that connects all units in Iraq, in theater and in Washington. All data and reports moving over SIPR are automatically classified, and no one will ever have the time or patience to go back and sort out the truly sensitive from the routine.

Vietnam was a wide-open war in terms of measures of progress or lack thereof. CIA and military analysts were accessible and engaged in public debates about the accuracy and the meaning of the data collected. Body counts, kill ratios and the Hamlet Evaluation System, as well as terrain held, emerged as statistical measures and were hotly debated, supported and debunked in the press.

In contrast, in the Iraqi insurgency the military has kept secret its measures of effectiveness. The New York Times reported in early November that the military in Baghdad had a sophisticated index for tracking progress that blended several quantitative measures. The Central Command responded by saying that whoever had leaked the index (that showed the situation on 18 October 2006) would, if discovered, be prosecuted.

Hence a writer does not have access at the unclassified level to reliable macro data that show how the war is going. Both General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and President Bush said in November of 2006 that we were not winning the war, nor were we losing it, a strange but not optimistic formulation. In January of 2007, President Bush said that he had concluded we were pursuing a strategy that was slowly failing. What measures led to these conclusions were unclear, since the composite measure at the secret level that General Casey was relying upon led him to conclude he was making slow progress, while the president concluded the opposite.

A journalist is at a disadvantage in addressing macro trends, when officials with access to huge staffs and reams of classified data have been unable to agree on the basic trends or what they portend. So in these four related narratives, I will concentrate upon reporting and deal gingerly with reaching broad analytical conclusions. The one exception – and it is admittedly large – is when I discuss arrests and imprisonments.

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[1] A former assistant secretary of defense (International Security Affairs) and Marine combat veteran, West is the author of numerous Rand Corporation reports on the Vietnam insurgency and several books on combat, including *Small Unit Action in Vietnam, The Village: a Combined Action Platoon, The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the US Marines and No True Glory: a Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah.*

My intent was to investigate four topics: 1) counterinsurgency doctrine and the balance between "clear and hold" and offensive operations; 2) the selection of Iraqi military leadership; 3) US small unit initiative; and 4) the nature of the war.

The four reports are attached. As proposed in the statement of work, I discussed the topics at length with officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, officials on the National Security Council and officers at I MEF and the Multi-National Force, Iraq.

Counterinsurgency Doctrine. How has counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq developed and how has it affected the balance between offensive operations and 'clear and hold' operations?

In 2003 and early 2004, the focus by the US units was on raids and sweeps to root out "the dead enders". The belief was that the armed opposition was comprised almost exclusively of members of Saddam's regime, isolated from society as a whole.

The April 2004 uprising caught US political and military leaders in Iraq by surprise. When it was over, the US was on the defensive. During the summer, conditions worsened. In August, General George W. Casey took over and put in place a campaign plan based on the counterinsurgency doctrine, as described by the White House, of "clear, hold and build."

Clearing with inadequate numbers of troops resulted in a series of offensive operations throughout 2005 in order to clear the al Qaeda in Iraq gangs from the Upper Euphrates Valley. That effort of pulling out US battalions from one location to clear another was termed "whack – mole".

Nonetheless, with Iraqi army units beginning to come on line, by the end of 2005, many in the high command believed the corner had been turned. Then came the bombing of the Samarra mosque and the Shiite militias that had consolidated power in Sadr City poured forth to retaliate, igniting the civil war. Once again, US forces had to be relocated and sent into Baghdad to try to restore order. At the end of 2006, a new strategy of clear and hold was developed for Baghdad by General David Petraeus, who took over from Casey.

As for Anbar, the heart of the Sunni insurgency, the tribal sheiks were claiming they had had enough killing by al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and were going to fight against them. Multi-National Force West, under the command of MajGen Richard Zilmer, put substantial stock in the pledge of the sheiks.

"This has been a year of tremendous change," Zilmer said. "In March 2006, al Qaeda began a murder and intimidation campaign that targeted the local tribal leaders. Those leaders who were not killed fled the country; in the following

months, al Qaeda killed, co-opted or hired the competing nationalist insurgent organizations... (now) we think the security climate has shifted in a positive manner. The concept is the same throughout (Anbar): clear the city of insurgents in partnership with the Iraqi army, hold the city by control of the population movement in and out of the city to screen the terrorists from the civilians, and then build internal security. The most notable recent development is the desire of the tribal leadership to take responsibility for their cities. " When Zilmer left in February of 2006, 16 of the 26 major tribes in Anbar had joined forces in a loose way to oppose AQI.

The concept at the beginning of 2006 was for US forces to step back and support Iraqi forces in the lead. That failed. By the end of 2006, the US ground forces were again in the lead, especially in Baghdad, focused upon counterinsurgency "clear and hold" operations.

In 2007, it was likely that US forces would succeed in reducing the intensity of the violence by their presence. Iraq had ceased to be a "kinetic", or shooting war. The enemy resorted mostly to roadside explosives. But what would prevent the violence from breaking out again in 2008 was unclear -- if the killers remained at large.

Indigenous Leadership. How are indigenous leaders selected and developed, and is this the key counterinsurgency task?

Through the summer of 2005, US trainers at all levels had considerable authority in selecting – and firing – Iraqi military officers. Once the Iraqi bureaucracy was fully comfortable that it had indeed sovereign power that the US would respect, then the US lost most of its ability to select Iraq's military leaders. Leverage remained, but at most an American brigade commander could apply sufficient pressure to make a change inside the Iraqi ranks about once every six months.

There would not be a problem in Iraq demanding 140,000 American soldiers if the Iraqis had adequate leadership. The insurgents were not better armed or better trained or more numerous than the Iraqi security forces. This was not a matter of technical incompetence. The reason there were failed or corrupt states was because the leaders failed. By restoring sovereignty, we took away our ability to replace poor leaders. It was not apparent how we could "train" 50 year-old leaders who were benefiting from the conditions we as outsiders were trying to change.

This lack of control over the selection of Iraqi security leaders was the single overriding weakness in the US counterinsurgency doctrine: our principles of liberation and swift restoration of sovereignty prevented us from selecting competent leaders.

If things go well, advisers in large numbers will be required in Iraq for years to instill confidence and a sense of victory. At the end of 2006, we were fighting a war we did not control; we could only make a last push in 2007 and early 2008, while advising reluctant Iraqis that they had to perform as national, rather than sectarian leaders.

Small Unit Decision-making. To what degree do American small unit leaders make independent combat decisions, or should an insurgency be fought in accord with centralized direction?

US doctrine stresses small unit initiative; US practice in Iraq has been to take away that initiative due to concern over taking casualties. Latitude for small unit leaders has been minimal in Iraq, with the exception of the two Fallujah battles in 2004, when the sheer size of the fight dictated that company, platoon and squad commanders take charge.

In general, force protection became a defining mission, with generals setting the rules for equipment convoy and patrol size. With near-perfect communications and enormous concern that no US soldier be captured or kidnapped, small units (squads and platoons) were restricted in their selection of operational tactics.

What was preached in schoolhouses and in the military manuals was not practiced. The model of the "strategic corporal" in theory had been that junior leaders would face extraordinary challenges and rise to the occasion, making decisions that in past wars would have been passed up the chain to a colonel or general. In reality, the corporals were constrained and the decisions and actions that became world famous were highly negative. Abu Ghraib and Haditha illustrated that the strategic corporal concept could work against American interests.

Nature of the War. Is Iraq an insurgency or a sectarian civil war, and does that make a difference in how the war is fought?

The basic answer was that it made a vast difference that the manuals overlooked. We were fighting two separate wars in Iraq. To the north and especially in Anbar Province to the west of Baghdad, the fight was against Sunnis sheltered by a sympathetic population inspired by sectarian loyalties; in Baghdad and its immediate environs, the US forces confronted both Sunni and Shiite gangs intent on killing the innocent and imposing ethnic cleansing as they fought a civil war.

In Anbar, the concept of operations was to hold the key cities with US and Iraqi (mainly Shiite) troops, while persuading the Sunni tribes to send their young men into the police and army (assured of assignment inside the province) with the goal of fighting al Qaeda in Iraq. AQI was seen as the toughest and least reconcilable of a dozen-odd insurgent groups. With few Shiites in the province,

the challenge was persuading the tribes to provide the backbone for local security by killing the Sunnis who were AQI.

The goal was to persuade the general Sunni population to turn against the Sunni insurgents. After four years, the US forces were extracting more cooperation. Once a Sunni joined the police or army, he was marked for death by AQI, if his identity could be determined. Many police avoided this fate by turning a blind eye to insurgent activities.

Some Sunnis were, however, genuinely swinging to the coalition side. The dilemma was that these brave men were, at the end of 2006, in essence throwing in with the Americans more than with the Baghdad government that did little to support them.

As for the dozen-odd insurgent groups in the Sunni Triangle that claimed to be "the honorable resistance" struggling to throw out the infidel invaders, whether they were serious about ceasing attacks remained problematical. Throughout 2006, the US high command believed a deal could be cut; at the beginning of 2007, the prospects looked grim. It was not clear the extent to which the sheiks and their followers now joining the police viewed these insurgent groups with the same implacable hostility that they held for AQI.

In Baghdad, the goal was to emplace US and Iraqi forces 24/7 in the local neighborhoods. The Americans might stay for perhaps up to a year, after which the Iraqi forces were expected to hold the neighborhoods on their own.

The greatest defect was that in both Anbar and Baghdad, the insurgents and death squads were not being arrested or imprisoned in adequate numbers to reduce the violence and restore order. In the past year in Baghdad, there were 50 to 100 times as many murders as in, for instance, New York City. But every year in NYC about 26,000 are arrested and imprisoned for violent crimes, compared to less than 3,000 in Baghdad. Baghdad was 100 times more dangerous, with ten times fewer arrests. The imprisonment rate in the United States was eight times higher than in murder-wracked Iraq.

The Iraqi and US forces had entered into a police war, but they were not arresting as police forces would. It remained to be seen if that would change in 2007.

A. Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice.

Background. In 2003 and early 2004, the focus by the US units was on raids and sweeps to root out "the dead enders". The belief was that the armed opposition was comprised almost exclusively of members of Saddam's regime,

isolated from society as a whole.

The April 2004 uprising caught US political and military leaders in Iraq by surprise. When it was over, the US was on the defensive. During the summer, conditions worsened. In August, General George Casey took over and put in place a campaign plan based on the counterinsurgency doctrine of "clear, hold and build."

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Nonetheless, with Iraqi army units beginning to come on line by the end of 2005, many in the high command believed the corner had been turned. Then came the bombing of the Samarra mosque in February of 2006 and the Shiite militias that had consolidated power in Sadr City poured forth to retaliate, igniting the civil war. Once again, US forces had to be relocated and sent into Baghdad to try to restore order.

In 2006, though, Maliki shielded Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and Maliki's ministries failed to provide the necessary financial and logistical support to the Iraqi army and police. American advisers in Anbar province had to drive to Baghdad each month to wheedle Iraqi police and soldiers' pay and food allowances from sclerotic ministries. Maliki had not cracked down on the Shia militias, and had done nothing to offer terms for reconciliation with the Sunnis.

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Against that background, in October of 2006, I visited the Counterinsurgency School at Bejii, north of Baghdad, that General Casey had started two years earlier. Every battalion commander and many company commanders and staff members were required to attend the one-week course, where Casey briefed his campaign plan to each class. The Executive Officer, LtCol Lloyd Navarro, showed me the classrooms and turned me over to three COIN instructors with experience in small unit tactics - Chris Smith, Jeff Munshaur and Maj. Steve Wright.

I noted the signs on the walls: "Make the Iraqis do it - don't win it for them." "Do everything combined - economic, military and political." "Remember - there is not a military solution." "Always remember there are third order effects to every military op."

The instructors made it clear were trying to convey basic principles so that the battalions did not approach Iraq based on a field manual of conventional tactics. Iraq hinged on persuading the population to support the government rather than

insurgents or militia. In 2005, the COIN school was trying to change a US military mind set focused on offensive operations.

"The US Army," General Casey told me, "has a predilection toward kinetics." Kinetics referred to shooting weapons, the basic building block for our infantry. Kinetics were natural enough for a superb army. But too much firepower resulted in unnecessary civilian casualties and antagonized the population.

Efforts to curb hasty shooting had been effective. In 2003 and 2004, there were too many instances of American troops firing on civilian cars for fear of a suicide bomber. By 2006, throughout the American battalions, the precepts of counterinsurgency were preached. "Take no action that creates another bad guy." "Dollars are bullets." "Win hearts and minds." Every civilian casualty caused by an American shooting had to be evacuated to a field hospital and a report filed. An article in Foreign Affairs magazine estimated that American firepower inflicted nine times fewer civilian casualties in Iraq than during the Vietnam War.

When fired upon, the troops responded selectively, with the escalation of force carefully calibrated. This led to situations such as described in this press release: "Insurgents attacked three different coalition locations ... In response, coalition forces established the origin of the gunfire and returned fire with small-arms and machine-gun fire. When the enemy's fire did not cease, coalition forces used increasing levels of force, including tank main-gun rounds followed by an air-delivered missile."

A veteran of World War II would not understand such restraint and gradual application of superior firepower. In conventional battle, the purpose was to apply overwhelming force. While the troops applied restraint, many I spoke with preferred their prior tour in Iraq (2004-2005) because, they said, "it was cleaner then. On large sweeps, we had a forward line of troops and knew where we could fire."

It wasn't changing what the soldiers learned in basic training that made counterinsurgency so hard; it was the frustration of being shot at and blown up without striking back, and without seeing progress. Nonetheless, in 2006 by most measures the American soldiers were demonstrating disciplined restraint in the application of fires. The instructors agreed that in the past 18 months they had seen the tendency to apply firepower drop dramatically.

In 2004, Generals Petraeus and Mattis had determined that the American offensive operations in Iraq were misguided and diverted attention from the development of Iraqi security forces. They developed a field manual on counterinsurgency as a means of proselytizing for radical change.

They succeeded in that mission. By late 2006, throughout the interagency

community and the Army and Marines, there was acceptance that COIN, not offensive ops or armored sweeps, was essential in Iraq. Every battalion I visited has gotten that philosophic message.

The frame of reference in the COIN field manual, though, alternated in tone because it sought to give advice to three different audiences: indigenous leaders, American commanders and American advisers. This left the reader confused about which group was being advised.

Here are a few illustrative quotes:

"Effective commanders know every village, road, field, population group, tribal leader, and ancient grievance within their area of operations." This seemed to focus on the American unit commander.

"Leaders set an example for the local population. Effective leaders embrace this role and understand its significance. It involves more than just killing insurgents; it includes the responsibility to serve as a moral compass that extends beyond the COIN force and into the community." This seemed to be addressed to the Iraqi commander.

"Effective leaders are placing a stronger emphasis on organizational change, developing subordinates, and empowering them to execute critical tasks in consonance with broad guidance. Self-development, life-long learning, and reflection on experience should be encouraged and rewarded." This seemed to be aimed at the American unit commander.

Since the COIN (counterinsurgency) field manual was the length of two books (about 150,000 words), some confusion within specific chapters was to be expected. More problematic was the question whether Iraq was a classic insurgency in the first instance. The stated purpose of the field manual was "to establish doctrine for military operations.....not focused on any region or country." Yet doctrine by definition must apply to *every country,* or else it is not doctrine. This posed a dilemma.

The critical assumption in the COIN manual was that historically insurgencies have been motivated by legitimate popular grievances and that economic development and moral scrupulosity by the government would win the support of the people. Iraq, however, differed from prior insurgencies because it was driven by tribal religiosity, rabid jihadism and a sectarian civil war. The Sunnis, wanting to remain on top as the oppressors, had revolted beginning in 2003 against the majority Shiites -- scarcely a legitimate grievance. The Shiites, in turn, did not in 2006 offer power-sharing, financial aid or other terms acceptable to the Sunnis, who had not accepted minority status in a democracy.

The Sunni insurgents and the Shiite government were not competing for the

ideological loyalty of the Sunni people, as had been the case between the South Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong guerrillas. No Sunni or Shiite was going to be converted to the other side.

The Sunni insurgents must be manifestly defeated before the Sunni people will dissociate from them. Acceptance of defeat is the psychological predecessor to rehabilitation. Economic proffers to win conversion to the government's side must follow after the population feels secure *and knows the insurgents are going to lose*

The US military's core competency was applying force, not political-psychological-economic wizardry. Although offensive operations were inappropriate in Iraq, an array of police-type operations (call it restrained force) was appropriate. The COIN curriculum was short on practicalities to implement the objective of providing security to the population. The counterinsurgency manual needed a specific police section. American forces had a detailed program for protecting civil rights, but none for arresting the insurgents.

After reviewing the syllabus, I asked how the exhortations that "dollars are better than bullets" and that "COIN (counterinsurgency) is 80% non-military" could be applied. How, for instance, would a battalion deploy in a city or set about rolling up a network of insurgents? How would a platoon assigned an area of operations, for example, that included 10,000 residents conduct counterinsurgency?

The instructors explained that they were discussing how to add specific techniques to the curriculum. As compared to early 2005, they had seen a major shift in attitudes, and that had been their first mission. Now they wanted to get across practical techniques, like the requirement for foot patrols, rather than remaining in the humvees.

"140,000 troops in country," an instructor said, "and they produce 3,000 patrols a day, including close-in security. That's not a sufficient number. Force protection has become its own mission. Even our advisers have to take four humvees to make one patrol. The senior levels insist on it. We're too risk-averse. We're not taking back the streets. The commanders understand the principles of counterinsurgency. The first is to make contact with the people, and you don't establish that by staying inside the wire or driving in convoys. The first technique we'd push as instructors if given more freedom to suggest improvements? That's simple: we'd argue for more foot patrols with the jundis. But this school is not in the business of operations; we're here to change attitudes."

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From the COIN school, I moved by helicopter with three other military analysts to Combat Outpost Dunlap in Khalideah, midway between Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar Province. Anbar, the stronghold of the Sunni insurgency, was the toughest area in Iraq, accounting for more American fataliites than Baghdad or any other province. Major General Richard Zilmer, who commanded all coalition forces in Anbar, or Multi-National Force - West, was fighting an economy of force war.

"I'm trying to clear and hold all the populated areas," Zilmer told me, "while relying on intelligence to launch spoiling raids."

On a strategic level, the math did not work. The Iraqi battalion had an area of operations 7 X 7 kilometers. Stationing one battalion per seven kilometers along 500 kilometers of populated river valleys was impossible. This led to the phrase "whack-a-mole", referring to the frequent transfer of an American battalion from one sector to another. The problem was that the large distances among the cities enabled the insurgents to flee when pressure became too great, then recover in safety in the farmlands.

At Outpost Dunlap, three companies were manning two bases and four traffic control points along the main highway. This left one company (100) out of a battalion of 350 able to conduct two three-hour patrols a day. Why not do more aggressive patrolling?

"It's a hundred degrees out there," an adviser explained, "and we just got them canteens last week."

"Anbar is deliberately starved. No money, no jobs, no future," a senior American general told me. "What do you think all those 19 year-olds Sunni kids are going to do? You can't kill them all! Instead this Iraqi government kisses Sadr's ass. His bozos are running ministries like Agriculture. Our Secretary of Agriculture flies all the way here to give him tips on how to become the bread basket of the Middle East, and Sadr's patsy refuses to see him! Those bastards had the nerve to do that! Anbar? Anbar gets nothing."

Brigadier General Baha Hassan, the Iraqi brigade commander, believed he was making progress in Khalideah.

"In January, the people threw rocks at us and said my jundis were Shiites who misbehaved," Hassan said. "Now they invite us to tea. Soon they will point out the insurgents."

Couldn't the police help him?

"The irahibeen (terrorists)," Hassan said, "hold the police as detainees - hostages. The police dare to do nothing."

Zilmer faced a staggering challenge. In an area the size of North Carolina, with nine key cities strung out along the 500 kilometers of the Euphrates River valley stretching from Syria to Baghdad, Zilmer was making do with about one US division and two half-strength Iraqi divisions, roughly 18 battalions, varying in strength from 1,000 in a US to 400 in an Iraqi unit.

So how could the insurgency be contained?

"The concept is the same throughout (Anbar)," Zilmer said. "Clear the city of insurgents in partnership with the Iraqi army, hold the city by controlling the population movement in and out of the city, and then build internal security. "

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Ten miles north of Khalideah lay the violent city of Ramadi. In the fall of 2006, downtown Ramadi looked like Berlin in 1944. It took an armored platoon to get the governor to work in the morning, where he sat in a usually empty office while on the roof a .50 caliber machinegun took a daily toll of insurgent snipers. The week before I arrived in October, the insurgents had assaulted the dingy, sandbagged government center. The Marines killed 29 attackers, then ceased firing to allow unarmed youths to emerge from the rubble and carry off their dead.

Ramadi, the capital of Anbar, was the only city in Iraq where gunfights were still routine in 2006. In late 2004, AQI leaders, fleeing from the assault upon Fallujah, had poured into Ramadi, eventually laying siege to the government center in the heart of the city. A woefully undersized force of two American battalions undertook a house-by-house operation to hold a city of 400,000. In five visits since 2004, I had watched the American casualties climb beyond those suffered in the Fallujah battle.

LtCol Steve Neary and his battalion (3/8) were leaving when I arrived. I had stayed with 3/8 in June and checked back in with Neary for an update. Neary told me his biggest challenge was to draw sufficient Sunni recruits for the army or the police. 85% of the police assigned to Ramadi lived outside the city.

Among other things, he had recently run an operation to close down the fuel system that was netting AQI an estimated $500,000 a month, diverting about 70% of the heavily subsidized gasoline and propane moving from the refineries to Ramadi, and controlling the three gas stations inside the city.

(This repeated a view I heard from Gen Casey and many of the battalion commanders: namely, that the subsidized fuel and energy system was systemically corrupt, with militias, officials, criminals and insurgents dividing up about $4 billion a year.)

In east Ramadi, a company commander, Captain Max Barela, sent his squads house to house with a detailed questionnaire. They took pictures of the males, numbered the houses and named the streets. These data were entered in a spreadsheet. In seven months, he gathered detailed information on 4,000 military-age males. His Marines knew someone in each of 2,500 houses.

"Out of 4,000, I had 60 who were positively dirty," Barela told me. "I sent 32 of them to prison. The others moved out. We knew everyone in our section."

When Barela finished his tour, he had turned his database to the new battalion. The commander of the new battalion, LtCol William Jurney, brought me to the roof of the government center where I stood looking out at shattered buildings, as the Marines awaited the daily harassing attack by snipers. The battalion was averaging five small arms fights a day, probably the highest rate in country by a considerable margin. Every Marine had fired 700 rounds in training before deploying.

"It's status in the gangs - impressing the older guys - and getting cash that causes those young idiots to take us on and be cut down," Jurney said. "The AQI money managers can always hire more. I'm here to help the Iraqis take over their own fight, not do it for them."

That strategy called for Iraqi forces to fill in where the Marines had cleared, then gradually ease them onto the front lines.

"Don't write what I'm going to do," Jurney told me. "They read everything they can to pick up intell. I'll tell them this: they're not going to see the same look from me two weeks in a row."

About half the city had a permanent Iraqi-American presence, like Barela's sector. The other half was a no man's land where the Marines would receive fire and stop Iraqi males walking from the area. Everyone had an ID card, fake or real.

Who was looking for working for work and who had just fired and ditched the rifle? Who lived where? Who was telling the truth? Most of the soldiers in the Iraqi battalion working with the Marines were Shiites from the south, with no more idea than the Americans.

In the States, a cop calls up the record of every driver he stops. He knows where and when you were last stopped, and what the charge was. The Chicago police carry a device that takes and transmits fingerprints over the radio, with a response received in minutes. All new prints are added to the database, in a simple two-way system that tracks the movements and associations of gang members.

In Iraq, the police had no detective equipment and no reliable identification system has been widely fielded. Since 2004, the Pentagon has fumbled and bumbled with a complex biometric system that includes retina scans. After years of sputtering, the contract was transferred from a West Virginia university to a mega defense corporation. As a result, American soldiers on patrol futilely called in the phonetic spelling of Iraqi names on whatever ID card they are handed. Enterprising rifle companies like Barela's were conducting their own independent census, employing rudimentary spreadsheets and personal digital cameras.

The lack of an identification system was the greatest technical failure of the war. For all of our efforts and expenditures in Iraq, we have ignored the most fundamental axiom of counterinsurgency warfare: An insurgency cannot be defeated if the enemy cannot be identified. In 1967, the South Vietnamese government completed a two-year "Census Grievance" program that collected house-by-house data in every contested district. In Iraq, we never even tried to do that in the Sunni Triangle.

Wherever possible, Jurney had his Marines living and working 24/7 with the IA. He planned to deploy advisers chosen from inside his battalion.

"I provide forty advisers, and I gain 400 jundis," Jurney told me. "Last year in Fallujah, our potential went up ten-fold by working with the Iraqis."

The Iraqi colonel told me he was pleased to be working with Marines, but that the police should not be trusted, a complaint common among the Iraqi military. While Jurney was showing me through an ops center, the Iraqi colonel - who asked that his name not appear in print - proudly announced that his soldiers had just captured three irihabeen (terrorists) at a nearby TCP (Traffic Control Point). They had let 572 cars through, searching about one in eight, and had detained only these three. A Marine whispered to me that they had no evidence. They just knew the guys were dirty. So it was likely the three would go free.

While we were talking, a firefight erupted down the street and a tank took a rocket hit that knocked out its electronics, but no one was seriously injured.

"Every day, it's something along those lines," Jurney said after he received the report.

The Iraqi soldiers and Marines amused themselves by building crude replicas of camera monitors and lashing them to trees, partially to deceive but also to taunt the insurgents. Sure enough, on the Internet the insurgents left a posting that they had cut a "camera" down and discovered nothing inside it. (The taunting reminded me of Sammy, a longtime interpreter, who occasionally got on the loud speakers mounted in psyops humvee and cursed the insurgents. The Marines would suggest the filthiest insults they could think of and Sammy would gleefully scream them at 120 dB.)

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Midway between Ramadi and Fallujah was a stretch of nasty farmlands called Habbineah, 40,000 people spread over 300 square kilometers. The effluvial richness of the Euphrates and Tigris supported vast, flat tracts of lush undergrowth and smooth fields for easy farming. The plots were divided by rows of palm trees that shielded the farmhouses from prying eyes, while the irrigation ditches channel vehicles and prevented surprise visitors. It was in this sort of terrain that Saddam and had Zarqawi sought refuge.

In the cities, the AQI had to be always on guard, lest a tank roar around a corner or commandos drop down in the night. It was safer for the leaders, bomb makers and assassins to slip in and out, leaving the daily defense of the home turf to the homeboys.

Highway Michigan provided a straight path through Habbineah along the Euphrates from Fallujah to Ramadi, but had been closed for over a year because the area offered too much concealment for IEDs. Closing Michigan forced a 130 kilometer detour, tripling transportation costs in the region. People were cutting down trees and bushes to store as fuel for the winter.

LtCol Todd DeGrossiers was commanding the 3rd Battalion of the 2d Marines. I had first met him in Fallujah in 2004, where he was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for clearing a building where he shot insurgents ten feet away, got his wounded out and used explosives to drop the building. The mission of his battalion in the Habbineah area was to clear and hold, especially along Michigan, and to restore normalcy. The shell-pocked buildings on both sides of the highway gave testament to years of hard fighting. In his ops center, DeGrossiers had a sign similar to those I saw in other ops centers. It read: "Treat the people like you would Americans."

It was a daunting assignment because there were no Sunni police or Iraqi Army available to partner with 3/2, and very few interpreters. DeGrossiers was determined to control the farmlands of Habbineah by placing platoons in outposts to clear and hold the villages and palm groves along thirty kilometers of highway. Twelve outposts from the battalion. Each platoon outpost was assigned a sector of several kilometers. The battalion averaged 65 patrols a day, with a minimum of eight Marines on each patrol.

About 40 infantry battalions - roughly 700 men each - comprised the battle core of the 140,000 American force in Iraq. Some kept their four companies together in old military camps. Others worked from company bases in abandoned schools or downtown apartment houses. Outside the cities, in places like Habbineah, each platoon lived in a two-story concrete house with a generator, running water, Internet connections, refrigerator, cots and simple meals.

DeGrossiers sent me to Kilo Company's sector, where for day and night patrols the grunts donned their armor and walked long routes through villages. The terrain and the smells reminded me of patrolling in Vietnam. The patterns were similar too - tactically sound formations, scant talk, varying routes, desultory peeks into houses, cryptic greetings exchanged with incurious villagers.

In Iraq, 70% of American casualties were caused by IEDs, hidden in trash heaps and inside dead animals, or dug into the dirt or buried under the road. With 3/2, it was snipers and IEDs, eventually inflicting over twenty fatalities. The Marines were shot at every few days, but sustained firefights were rare - one every three or four months.

In Habbineah, there was one section of bulrushes hidden from observation where Kilo Company found an IED every other day. Finally, through powerful binoculars a sentry in a watch tower a one-armed man emerged from the spot and mingled among the shoppers at a roadside market. A patrol ran down the road and grabbed him. Startled, he blurted out - how did you pick me out? The Marines loved telling me that story.

The insurgent leaders kept a low profile, and the Marines had no Iraqi security forces working with them. So the Marines patrolled, patrolled, patrolled, waiting for the insurgents to make a mistake, like the one-armed man did. The battalion encountered six IEDa a day and had lost eight killed in seven weeks. Snipers were becoming more deadly, taking one shot, then remaining hidden among the buildings.

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To look at other counterinsurgent techniques, I checked in with Regimental Combat Team 7 at al Assad, 40 miles north of Ramadi. I hitched a ride in a convoy with Cpl Benjamin Potts, 22, who was driving a seven-ton. In two months, he had logged 5,000 miles and estimated he spent about 50% of his time behind the wheel.

"I like it," he said. "I pick up some tips from the old guys." He pointed to a group of truckers straight from central casting - heavyset guys with beards, pony-talis, levis, jackets with a dozen strange patches, and all chewing tobacco. These were the civilian truckers paid $100,000 (vs. $18,000 for Potts.) There was no friction, however. The old guys shared their cabs with the bunk beds when they were stuck overnight, and pitched in anytime there was a breakdown.

When we rolled into Assad, after waiting 20 minutes for a 100-truck convoy to exit, we passed several soldiers bicycling to work from Pizza Hut, wearing safety

helmets, pedaling past signs that warned: Bicyclists - 12 KPH (kilometers per hour); Vehicles - 24 KPH.

"It's a $60 fine if you don't have a fluorescent strip on your bike," Potts said.

Inside the ops center, LtCol Matt Jones brought me to a huge map and pointed out the vast distances. For instance, two Light Armored Reconnaissance companies, with 72 Light Armored Vehicles, were responsible for a swath of desert measuring 10,000 square kilometers, with 500 miles of main roads, stretching northwest from Assad to the Syrian border, then cutting south for a 100 miles before cutting east for 160 miles back to Fallujah. Hijackings, kidnappings and extortion along the highways were common.

"We drive off the hard top and across the desert wherever we can," Jones said. "Don't let them see a pattern for their IEDs. Look at the size of the AO. You can't patrol a thousand kilometers of highway with a handful of LAVs. I think the solution is convoys, like in World War II across the Atlantic. That requires the government to get organized, though."

"You don't beat this insurgency. You suppress it until there's a political settlement. By and large, the Sunni people don't feel they have a stake in the Baghdad government. They don't want to be involved with the Marines or the insurgents either."

Next I met with LtCol Jeffrey J. Dill, who had commanded a battalion and now was evaluating the adviser effort. He had traveled throughout the AO.

"We're getting there at the Iraqi battalion level," he said. "But we can have a great Iraqi army and they'll be under siege, like in Ramadi, unless there's a good local police system. The cops can't have their families with them until they have solid control."

And had he ever seen that in Anbar?

"One place - al Qaim," Dill said. "Two battalion commanders in a row - Dale Alford and Nick Morano - cut a deal with the local tribe and pulled it off. Of course, the cops, the police chief, the mayor - all belonged to the tribe and who knows what that meant. But it worked."

Zilmer had told me the same thing. "The most notable development is the desire of the tribal leadership to take responsibility. One of the most secure areas in Anbar is the al Qaim region near the border."

The commanding officer of the 7th Marine Regiment, Col. Blake Crowe, agreed.

"Qaim is working. But remember, we rotated seven battalions through there and fought a major battle before it settled down," he said. "I have my battalions partnered with seven Iraqi battalions. Fallujah, Ramadi, Hit, Haditha and Qaim are key to Anbar. Out here, my number one priority is persuading the towns and cities to recruit local police. This is a police action. But there's no reliable national ID system. Cars have two or three license plates. So my battalions are taking their own census."

How, I asked Maj. Chris Dowling, the S-3 operations officer, do you know if you're making progress? He took a minute before answering.

"We're working to recruit police, and we have six battalions of Iraqis. The Iraqis have two faces. They don't know how committed we are. And we don't know what we don't know about the Iraqi culture."

Dowling was reflecting what I heard from dozens of advisers. There's no special connection between the Iraqi army battalions and the people in their areas of operations. The battalions, predominantly Shiite, are there to do a job and perform more or less satisfactorily, not least because they have advisers both supporting and watching them. Many advisers believed that if the American battalions pulled out and the advisers were too few to show example by patrolling, the Iraqi battalions would gradually pull back and let Anbar stew in its own juices, warring sporadically with al Qaeda in Iraq and cut off from oil revenues, an empty desert and a meandering river valley populated by impoverished, uneducated and resentful Sunni tribes incapable of organizing or sacrificing for their own self-interest.

Anbar was an economy of force operation because Baghdad hung in the balance. Yet the mortal military threat was al Qaeda in Iraq. So how, I had asked General Casey, could he do more with less? Casey urged me to visit al Qaim, a city on the Syrian border 250 miles west of Baghdad. "Look at what Col. Alford accomplished," Casey told me. "He was one of my best battalion commanders. He showed how to turn a city around."

Inside military circles, there were two success stories with strong parallels: Col. H.R. McMaster in Tal Afar, 180 miles north of Baghdad, and LtCol Dale Alford in al Qaim, 230 miles west of Baghdad. McMaster commanded a brigade of 3,500 soldiers, and Alford commanded a battalion of 750 Marines.

The basics of the Qaim story were simple. Al Qaim was a city of 100,000 on the Euphrates at the Syrian border. The overall area of operations included 230,000 people scattered across 2,000 square kilometers of desert and river valley. AQI controlled Qaim, as they had Fallujah in 2004. In the fall of 2005, Alford'a battalion swung through the desert and swept into the city from the west. The Al Qaeda fighters were caught facing the wrong way. The battalion battled the insurgents block by block and drove most of them from the town.

Once he had the upper hand, Alford broke his battalion down into small units to train and live with Iraqi soldiers. A strong local tribe, the Abu Mahal, had been feuding with AQI. He persuaded the Abu Mahal to form a police force, promising he would protect them. The police chief, the Iraqi battalion commander and the head of the city council were all members of Abu Mahal, an arrangement that gave the tribe primacy over smuggling and local services. When Alford's battalion left in the winter of 2006, the new Marine battalion expanded what Alford had begun.

When I visited Qaim in October, the streets were teeming with shoppers. I walked through a bustling market where the merchants were complaining about commerce, not security. The local bank, with $100,000 in dinars, had no armed guards. The American civil affairs colonel told me he had five times more projects in Qaim than in any other city in Anbar.

"In Baghdad, the high command believes that if we do more economic projects, the Iraqis will swing away from the bad guys," LtCol Andrew Roberto, a civic action director, told me. "They are exactly wrong. When we Americans start projects and the Iraqis don't commit, the projects change no attitudes. They have to stand up and take ownership. In Haditha, projects are dead because the people are afraid to accept our money. In 2004, 90% of my projects were blown up because they had coalition fingerprints on them. Now the insurgents will allow some projects, but you could spend years out here doing projects and not have the Iraqis buy in. In Qaim, they took responsibility. My micro-finance projects took off. They even have soccer matches in that town."

When I accompanied a foot patrol downtown, I noticed none of the police wore masks to hide their identities. We walked down a side street, where several policemen proudly pointed out their houses. No strangers come here, they assured me. Dusty graffiti covered one courtyard wall, speaking to the psychological battle for control of the city. One slogan in Arabic read: "Home of a traitor who aids infidels." It was crossed out, and next to it was written: "Home of a Hero of the Abu Mahal."

The Al Qaeda in Iraq extremists were fierce fighters. It seemed doubtful that tribal members had suddenly discovered street fighting skills. Near one street corner, the balcony of a house had been demolished and the walls gouged by bullets. I asked if the police if they had done that. No, they laughed, irahibeen (terrorists) were hiding there, so we brought Marines.

Alford had provided a squad for every police patrol. When police and other tribal members pointed out al Qaeda, the Marines attacked. Stripped of anonymity, the insurgents were driven from the city. What brought success was combining Marine grunts with Iraqi forces that possessed local knowledge. The tipping point had come when a major tribe joined the fight against AQI.

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In Qaim, Marine battalion 3/4 was working with three Iraqi battalions (a total of 800 soldiers present for duty) and about 800 IP on the streets (out of a payroll of 1300), or one ISF per 150 people, about the same ratio as police to residents of New York City. In Qaim, though, they fought with rocket launchers, mortars and machine guns. So could the American battalion be pulled out of Qaim? In one form or another I posed that question to a dozen advisers working with the border police, the town police and the Iraqi army.

"The police and the army don't patrol together," LtCol Scott Shuster, the 3/4 commander said. "Yet the police chief and the brigade commander are brothers. Natural jealousies between forces."

Partially, the advisers said, the separateness was due to an army attitude of superiority and partially due to suspicion of police motives. Both forces and their leaders wanted to control the town and benefit from the power that comes with control. Both found it easier to work with the Americans than with each other. The police liked to set up traffic control points; the army liked targeted raids and cordons. The intelligence for both activities came from the Abu Mahal tribe.

One of the keys to success in Al Qaim was the partnership between the U.S. military and the local police. Alford had actively cultivated this partnership by breaking down his force into smaller units so that American leaders worked with Iraqi army platoons and police stations. He was convinced that lasting progress depended on Iraqi soldiers and police walking the streets, believing that they would win the ten-second firefights against insurgents.

Alford wrote an article in the Marine Corps Gazette, proposing to break down an infantry battalion into an "Iraq American Advisor Group." The basic idea was to have combat-seasoned American military leaders present in sufficient numbers amid the local police and Iraqi army forces to ensure they would always prevail in clashes with insurgents. Officers and NCOs "would live, eat, and work with their Iraqi counterparts, donning Iraqi uniforms," and advise them on all aspects of combat. Alford also recommended matching a Quick Reaction Force with each Iraq American Advisor Group.

The precedent for this was the Combined Action Platoon program in Vietnam, in which a Marine division deployed more than 100 squads (thirteen marines in each) to live in remote hamlets with militias made up of farmers. The average CAP patrolled nine square kilometers holding 5,000 villagers. Many CAPs had no fixed bases, and they kept moving around the hamlets at night so the Viet Cong could not find them. I had written a book called The Village about one such CAP.

The CAP program was successful, as far as it went. In February of 1968, several thousand North Vietnamese tried to sneak through the hamlets to assault the northern city of Da Nang. They never made it, as they were ambushed time and again by the tiny CAP units stretched across the paddy lands. Not one CAP village was ever retaken by the Viet Cong. The program's advocates argued that it was a force multiplier, because each marine gained four Vietnamese riflemen who knew the area and spoke the language.

In Ramadi, a battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Jurney, had used the same argument. Army Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, who commanded a company in Anbar, published an article in the Armed Forces Journal calling for an expanded advisory program based on the CAPs. In the Fallujah area, Colonel Nicholson had already doubled the number of advisers. At the end of 2006, though, the number of American advisers—3,500—was completely inadequate to advise the more than 500 Iraqi companies and police units.

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B. Indigenous Leadership. How are indigenous leaders selected and developed, and is this the key counterinsurgency task?

Overview. In 2005-2206 hand-off of security responsibility to the Iraqis proceeded slowly, then stumbled altogether as sectarian loyalties conflicted with unit cohesion. In 2006, the police in Baghdad showed they were worthless, while the Army could not respond. Despite their large numbers, the Iraqi security forces had not consistently stood up to the far smaller Iraqi insurgent and militia forces. Why?

The Iraqi culture and the nature of the adversaries provided part of the answer. Most Iraqis lived in urban centers, row upon row of dusty concrete houses with scant architectural variance, each enclosed by a stout concrete wall. Inside the walls, most houses had patches of grass as well tended as putting greens, tiny oases of comfort and familial security.

The scene reflected a society beaten down by decades of tyranny. You took care of your own, avoided strangers and public talk and raised your hand to volunteer for nothing. Your home was your castle. What took place outside was none of your business.

Relatives lived in adjoining houses; sub-tribe settled in the same blocks. Garbage was pitched over the walls; the common areas were no one's concern. The family came first, then the relatives, then the tribe.

The organization of the insurgents and militias reflected this society. They were the homeboys, recruited from their neighborhoods. Most skirmishes and battles consisted of one or two heads poked around a corner, a short burst of fire, and a

fusillade of American return fire. Any insurgent who stood still for a few seconds was cut down. The insurgents learned to shoot and scoot.

Each gang or cell had local leaders who, if they survived three years against American firepower, achieved promotion by being cunning and adaptable. Detailed tactical lessons and morale-boosting videos of bombings were shared over the Internet. They roamed about in cars and pickups, using the highways to join other gangs for larger-sized attacks and taking care to remove incriminating items from their homes and cars. Weapons were cached so that they could shoot and saunter away among the other civilians.

While the insurgents and militias were organized from the bottom up, the Iraqi Army was organized from the top down. The Army was abolished by American dictat in 2003 - a dreadful mistake - then reestablished in 2004. The new Army was organized into divisions, brigade and battalions, although it faced an insurgent threat.

Since then, the Americans have trained over 100,000 soldiers, perhaps 70% of whom are poorly-educated Shiite youths from the south who needed jobs. Both because they were suspicious of the government and intimidated by the insurgents in their neighborhoods, few Sunnis joined the army. And, to the exasperation of the Americans, Baghdad refused to lower the literacy tests to recruit more Sunnis. As a result, when Iraqis battalions moved into the Sunni Triangle, the locals complained about the number of Shiite soldiers.

Senior officers were brought back from the old army to fill the higher ranks. Under Saddam, officers came from the middle class, attended the military academy, and enjoyed lives of comfort as long as they obeyed orders. Senior officers refused to promote aggressive but uneducated warrant officers or sergeants. Rank conferred privilege more than responsibility.

In the American tradition, the officer ate last, led first and was promoted on merit. Every battalion commander and sergeant major was out daily with the troops, leading from the front. Generals showed up unannounced on battlefields. Leadership was focused to support the platoon and squad leaders.

In contrast, Iraqi officers preferred to serve on the staffs, rather than to lead men. Too many officers slipped into old habits and, because Iraq was a sovereign country, Americans could cajole but not fire them. Perhaps 50% of officers were unacceptable by American standards.

To improve performance, a dozen American advisers were assigned to each Iraqi battalion. Their primary role was to assist the staff in planning and operations. In actuality, much of their time and effort went into interceding with Iraqi higher headquarters to get pay, food and equipment for the battalion. The

Iraqi higher levels, including the ministries in Baghdad, have not supported the battalions in the field.

Through the summer of 2005, US trainers at all levels had considerable authority in selecting – and firing – Iraqi military officers. Once the Iraqi bureaucracy was comfortable that it had indeed been given sovereign power that the US would respect, then the US lost most of its ability to select Iraq's military leaders.

This lack of control over the selection of leaders was the single overriding weakness in US counterinsurgent applications. The irony is that our principles of liberation for the sake of creating a democracy and the swift restoration of sovereignty to Iraq prevented us from selecting competent military leaders. Leverage remained, but at most an American brigade commander could apply sufficient pressure to make a change inside the Iraqi ranks about once every six to twelve months.

There would not be a problem in Iraq demanding 140,000 American soldiers if the Iraqis had adequate leadership. The insurgents were not better armed or better trained or more numerous than the Iraqi security forces. This was not a matter of technical incompetence. The reason there are failed states is because the leaders fail. It is not apparent how we "train" 50 year-old leaders who are benefiting from the very conditions we as the outsiders are trying to change.

In Baghdad, I visited with Major Chuck Marcos, who had commanded a MiTT in the city for six months. He believed the Ministry of Defense had tightened its control over the Iraqi battalion he advised, with fewer operations resulting. The JAM (Jesh al Mahdi) controlled all nine gas stations in his area and the jundi said the JAM "were not so bad". He had seen most Iraqi officers cheat in small ways, taking a small slice of money intended for the soldiers' food allowance, taking fuel for their cars, etc.

One night he tried to lay out on a blackboard all the scams he had seen. He ended up with a headache. It was too complicated to sort through. I heard variations on this theme repeatedly. Marcos said there was one brave officer at the company level and the jundis followed him in every fight. Then through jealousy he was fired.

"We had to use a silver bullet - our brigade commander - to get him back," Marcos said.

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In Anbar, I spoke with Col. Bob Coates, who oversaw the military transition teams (the advisers or MiTTs) working with the Iraqi Army and police. Coates had worked as an adviser in El Salvador during the guerrilla war in the 80s and had been the Marine liaison with the disastrous "Fallujah brigade" in 2004. He'd

seen enough to be shrewd and cautious in his assessments. Why, I asked him, was it so difficult to train the Iraqi army?

"In El Salvador, we were working with an army that shared our value system," he said. "We could bring them around gradually. Here in Anbar, we're starting from scratch - no shared values or cultural heritage. We don't have a picture of their inner circle. The more you stay here, the more you don't know. The Iraqi army units out here don't have faith in the central government."

At best, the American diplomats and senior officers were tempered in their assessments of Iraqi officials, singling out some colonels, generals and police chiefs for praise and refusing to comment on others among the senior leadership.

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The nature of the war in both the insurgent-wracked Sunni Triangle and in the sectarian civil war in Baghdad required firm national leaders. Such leadership, unfortunately, was the missing ingredient.

Baghdad suffered from three mutually-reinforcing security problems. The first was hard-core criminals. In 2002, Saddam emptied the prisons, setting free a generation of criminals. New York City sends 60,000 criminals to prison in a year. Baghdad sends perhaps 2,000 to 4,000. The police in Baghdad are terrible. Rio de Janeiro, Lagos and other cities with terrible policing, however, are able to retain functioning governments, because criminals do not bring down governments.

The second problem was Sunni car bombers whose lair was primarily west of Baghdad. To mitigate mass murder required Iraqi army control of the hinterlands. The farm area to the west, however, is vast, and a half million cars move inside Baghdad each day. The slaughter of innocents, however, will continue in Baghdad for years and years.

The third problem was the Shiite militias drawn from 100,000 unemployed youths. By their presence and raids, the American forces were preventing the sectarian violence from escalating to Jacobin proportions of terror. It appeared that neither Moqatada Sadr nor any other single Shiite leader was orchestrating these death squads who belonged to 23 separate militia groups, although the Mahdi Army was the ringleader in trying to push all Sunnis from east Baghdad.

"One school of thought is that Maliki is consolidating his Shiite base before reaching out to the Sunnis," a senior American general told me in October of 2006 . "The other school is that he is consolidating his Shiite base."

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One morning in early October, a platoon from the Iraqi 2d Division escorted me along Palestine St., south of Sadr City. The shop owners were complaining, through an interpreter, about security. Robbers come every afternoon, they said, usually in police uniforms. (Anyone can buy a uniform.) They demand protection money, or they take what money they can find, or they kidnap you for ransom. We need the Iraqi army here, on the streets.

An American adviser told me his Iraqi unit lacked self-confidence and hated to be on foot patrols alone. They would need Americans for years. Our interpreter, Fouad - no interpreter wants his full name to be printed - looked at the soldiers around me and nodded.

"The biggest wrong thing is the top. Deals," Fouad said. "We catch the irihabeen (terrorists) and they let them go, or tell us not to go there (to Sadr City). It's all deals. The top don't care about the country."

With three Americans and five Iraqis, all well armed, we walked for hours through the city. In the poorest Sunni slums, with raw sewage festering in the streets, men in tattered clothes swarmed around us, smiling and nodding. "Army good. Americans good. Police bad." They thrust the hunks of metal and twisted tail fins from mortars at us, gesturing down the street, plainly aggrieved by a recent attack.

Farther down the street, we crossed an invisible boundary into a Shiite slum, where the men were more standoffish. But they warmed up enough to gesture at the Sunni slum, shaking their fists and warning us of snipers who randomly shot at crowds. On a few corners, Iraqi soldiers sat behind machine-guns, manning checkpoints.

"The IA (Iraqi Army) has these fixed sites all over. They're bored and the bad guys know not to drive up with weapons," Major Bo Davenport, an adviser, said. "Sadr City is right behind us. That's where we need check points. But the MOI (Ministry of Interior) won't let us near the place. Sadr is the power here."

We stopped to chat with Colonel Hassan, an Iraqi battalion commander. Over his office door an Arabic sign read, "No Shiia, No Sunni, All Iraqis." His deputy had been assassinated at his home a few blocks away, and Hassan never went home in uniform.

Davenport and the MiTT (Military Transition Team) with whom he worked argued strongly that eleven advisers in a MiTT were insufficient. They argued that a US infantry platoon should be embedded with every Iraqi company. I heard similar sentiments from almost all the MiTTs I visited. Most wanted the MiTT to number anywhere from 20 to 40 (including drivers, etc.) Most advisers were skeptical that the Iraqi battalions would patrol aggressively unless combat advisers were with them.

The Iraqi battalion was averaging one serious arrest per week - meaning someone all agreed should be imprisoned for a long time. The MiTT ruefully added that when they arrested "a really big fish", the senior Iraqi officers received phone calls from the Ministry of Defense or high-level politicians urging his release.

The MiTT resented the demands of higher US staffs issued via the Internet. They estimated one to three of seven days were wasted on needless administration caused by too many levels of staff with too much time on their hands.

The advisers believed they knew which Iraqi Army officers should be fired or promoted. Overall, the advisers were satisfied with the progress at the Iraqi battalion level. The level of corruption was more annoying than paralyzing. Given another five year or so, they believed most of the defects could be corrected.

They were dissatisfied with the Iraqi senior staffs and the ministry, where up to a dozen signatures were required to authorize a payroll or basic gear. Part of the problem was fear of being accused on stealing; a larger problem was that the bureaucracy was comprised of amateurs learning on the job, after the largely Sunni professional class with membership in the Baath Party was fired.

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The organization the American advisors considered broken was the Baghdad police force. So when I left Baghdad in early October to visit Anbar Province, I asked the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) to steer me toward a few examples of dedicated police. The MEF suggested I take a look at some cities in Upper Euphrates valley, a surprising answer given that the Upper Euphrates had a notorious reputation.

North of Ramadi, the Euphrates River valley meanders in a few lazy loops, creating a vast plain of fecund fields and palm groves. Within 2,000 square kilometers of farmland called "the Triad", three towns with a combined population of 85,000. The Triad, just below the damn at Haditha, was a passageway for the 60-odd foreign fighters infiltrating from Syria each month.

My first stop was at Baghdadi, a lonesome truck stop on a major highway around which town of 10,000 has grown, guarded by a battalion from the Iraqi 7th Division and a hundred police. In June of 2005, a dozen contractor trucks had screeched to a halt outside a small Marine outpost at the edge of the road. An Iraqi guard from the convoy stormed up to the gate, demanding ammunition to attack the robbers down the road who had just killed his brother. Given fresh weapons, he gathered up a few other Iraqis, drove off and shot the robbers. The

Marines promptly promoted Barzan Sha'ban from truck guard to police chief, with the Iraqi rank of colonel.

When I met him, he was proudly wearing the eagles that designate an American colonel. "Some people call me a Jew and say I work for infidels because I wear the American rank," he said. "I tell them Americans strong and do good things, Takfiri (terrorists) steal and kill and do shit. I know the bad guys. Jamil Dhahan kill that Special Forces guy. I find him and put him away."

The advisers with me had not heard that story, but later confirmed that a Jamil Phahan, wanted for killing an American soldier in 2005, had indeed been arrested by the Baghdadi police. Sha'ban and his force had scant formal police training. There was one academy in Baghdad and another in Jordan, but the police chief had only one lieutenant that had formal training. The police advisers I spoke with were not that concerned about the lack of training. To them, the most important ingredients were leadership and guts, and Sha'ban had both.

"Foreign terrorists," Sha'ban said, "I kill half and put half in jail. Go to jail six, seven months, then start again. Iraqi government send them home. I want American people to know they should stay in jail."

"Sha'ban just lost another brother. He's pretty pissed about letting people go," Lt. Patrick Kinser, the police adviser, told me.

The police station, enclosed inside a former military camp surrounded by high walls and guard towers, had the feel of a maximum-security prison. Next to the station were a soccer field, a school and rows of town houses with air conditioning in the windows. The streets were neat, with no garbage and few cars. A few sheep and goats were wandering around the large, open fields.

"All police families now live on base. Fifteen police recruits were gunned down outside the gate. The poor bastards went into a restaurant for lunch. Two carloads of al Qaeda drove up, executed them and drove off," Kinser said. "If the families need food and the police haven't been paid, they stop trucks on the highway. We want them to start their own gardens. The families don't dare go to the market. A 14 year-old had his throat slit because he was laughing with us Americans."

Sunni police like those serving under Sha'ban faced three bad choices. If they lived with their families in the community, they risked intimidation and death. Or they could work in a city far away from where their families lived, and visit home for a week once a month. Or they could live on base behind barbed wire, as in Baghdadi, isolated from their relatives and the community.

The police in Baghdadi had made their choice. In essence, they were the ones inside a prison, while the insurgents lived at home. Sha'ban was in the fight, no

question about that. But his closest allies were the Americans, as signified by his pride in wearing the eagles that signified the rank of an American colonel. His support was provided by Americans. His biggest boosters were Americans. Somewhere ahead lay the transition into an Iraqi system.

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Equipping, training and paying the police posed a challenge equal to that of finding committed leaders like Sha'ban. Ten miles north in Haditha, the advisers to police spent most of their time cadging and scrounging. Major Eric Glassie, a reservist and 15-year veteran in the FBI, found that his primary job was providing the police with the bare essentials of life.

"There are 35 cops at the key downtown station," Glassie said. "They have 22 uniforms and 25 pistols. They share shirts and helmets. They have no running water, no TV, no pillows and no gas for their vehicles. We pitch in to buy them food. The Iraqi system sucks."

Did he have a concept of operations for how the police could get control, given that they had a good leader?

Glassie and his deputy suggested a concept of operations along these lines:

1. IP live in barracks in towns at least 100 kilometers from their families; do not divulge where ther families lived
2 Sunni IP in Sunni areas, Shiite in Shiite areas
3 US select as police chiefs strong leaders; techniques can be taught; let the chief demonstrate his wasta (aura of influence) by a large office, perks, etc.
4 start with infantry platoon tactics; insurgents cannot defeat a platoon
5 add raid tactics
6 provide an ID and census package on an emergency basis
7 add the roll-up tactic - nab one and when he divulges an associate, immediately nab the next
8 let the police chief impose fines and confiscate property
9 establish unity of command
10 fully equip on a crash basis
11 pay on time
12 accept that 30% won't be present for duty
13 allow the advisers to insist on relieving IP for incompetence
14 work opsec 24/7 under the assumption that someone will betray divulge every planned operation

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The Iraqi Army battalion in Haditha fared better in equipment, but was also struggling. The company sharing the base with the police was authorized 120

and had 50 present for duty. Eighteen were on leave, while another 50 had quit, not because of the fighting, but because of the wretched living conditions. There was a rumor that those who quit joined the police in their hometowns in the south, where they could sleep at home, safe inside Shiite cities.

LtCol Norm Cooling had commanded Battalion 3/3 in Haditha for seven months, with an area of operations (AO) of 40 X 70 kilometers. The battalion had lost 15 killed and 88 wounded.

""We tried to do our own census in the city and start a police force. The Iraqi Army was as blind as we were," Cooling said. "The insurgents killed anyone who spoke to us. We sent 400 detainees up to regiment. We knew of twelve cases that eventually came before a judge. Most of the others were let go at some point in the process. Release is a huge problem that puts the troops in a very tough position. Bitterly frustrating."

The troops referred to the releases as "OpFor recock', alluding to the nightly repositioning, or re-cocking, of the Opposition Force in exercises in the State.

"We now have MiTT and PTT (police transition teams) and CAG (Civic Action Group), plus Iraqi Army and police," Cooling said. "I'm a believer in unity of command, and we don't have that. But the most difficult part was getting the Iraqi government to pay the soldiers and police. We went for many months with no pay. It is excruciatingly painful to get the Iraqi government to do anything for Anbar."

From top to bottom throughout Anbar, I heard the same complaint: the government in Baghdad largely ignored the province.

Major General Richard Zilmer, commander of American forces in Anbar, told me, "Since 2004, Baghdad has owed Anbar tens of millions. Few Iraqi officials ever come out here."

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Three other military analysts and I met with Prime Minister Maliki at his residence inside the Green Zone in late September. He began with a set talk. Under Saddam there was no freedom, he said, but now people were free to criticize anyone, including their own leaders. The American press should pay attention to the progress made in most provinces. Yes, there were still killings, but not as many as under Saddam. Maliki said his priorities were relaxation on the ban against Baathists, equitable revenue sharing among the provinces, federalism and clean water.

Asked about the violence in Baghdad, he blamed L. Paul Bremer, the President's envoy to Iraq in 2003, for poorly trained police. I asked why he did not release the funds owed to Anbar.

"They have money," he said. "The security keeps them from spending it."

I suggested, then, that a public offer of funds would have the political advantage of showing he was serious about reconciliation, yet cause no drain on the budget. "They already know," he said.

The next day, I met with the Coalition's chief of training, LtGen Martin Dempsey, who had commanded the 1st Armored Division in 2004. I asked the affable Dempsey why the Iraqi security forces weren't adequately supported.

"The Iraqi system hoards," Dempsey said. "Every level keeps something from those below it. It's ingrained from the Saddam era. My top priority has been getting the ministries to support their own forces."

Advisers routinely drove hundreds of kilometers a month to Baghdad to arrange food convoys and pick up payrolls that required up to twelve signatures to be released. Safe behind massive barricades, the Iraqi bureaucrats in Baghdad showed no sense of urgency or concern. The bottom level - where the fight would be won or lost - was doing without. So the Americans had to step in.

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"I understand the ministries have to be forced to work," LtCol Donnellan, the battalion commander in Haditha who replaced Cooling, told me. "I'm going to pitch in regardless. I'm not leaving the police with nothing because their own system ignores them."

That wasn't easy. Donnellan could share some food with the Iraqis and scrape up some spare cots and jackets, but not enough for the scantily-equipped Iraqi soldiers and police.

"Their ministries have funds," Dempsey said. "They're not releasing them."

Corruption also contributed to shoddy trucks and flimsy weapons. In 2004, the Minster of Defense, Hazem Shaalan, paid $1.3 billion for junk weapons from Egypt, Pakistan and Poland - armored cars that couldn't stop a rifle bullet, machine-guns priced at $3,500 each and produced for $200, AK bullets purchased for 16 cents and manufactured for four cents, with high failure rates. Shaalan and Cattan skipped the country after pulling off one of the biggest thefts in history.

In 2004, when Congress appropriated $18 billion for Iraq, Bremer allocated only $4 billion, later raised to $5 billion, for the army and police. While US commanders stressed a partnership with the Iraqis, the disparity in resources was glaring.

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"In an American battalion, even if the battalion commander is weak, the XO or the 3 can take up the slack," LtCol Paul Lebidine, a brigade adviser in Qaim, told me. "In the IA, you don't have a deep bench. The C.O. has to be on his game. The officers who have gone to the old academy won't fire their own, period."

"I think they can prevail – their way." Maj Jarrod Stoutenborough, also an advser in Qaim, said. " Their basic tactic is the cordon and search. Each unit wants to stay in one area. If we weren't here, they'd behave differently and the press wouldn't like it."

Another battalion adviser, Maj Stanley Horton, seconded the continuing need for advisers. "The Iraqi security system can't work without an American backbone," said.

I asked an interpreter who had been in Qaim for three years with five US battalions what he thought.

"Anbar has no education. The youths are easily programmed by AQI. They believe anything," Mr. Anwar Addas (pseudonym) said. "80% of the police and army officers are not qualified. To succeed will take another three or more years."

Dave from Baghdad, another interpreter who had served with four US battalions, agreed. "If no Marines stay with the police here, the tu-heed (insurgents) will come back. They are not defeated."

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The challenges at the end of 2006 in Iraq were easy to list; the solutions remained problematical. First, the senior civilians and officers in the Iraqi army must stop hoarding and start supporting their own soldiers. Second, the Shiite police must be broken up and provided new leadership, while Sunni police must be persuaded to take action against insurgents. Third, the judicial system must deal in a fair manner with detainees; meaning many, many more must remain incarcerated. Fourth, the Sunnis must be assured of reconciliation, meaning money flowing from oil revenues and of posts in the government.

The key to each of the four tasks was Iraqi leadership. But the higher up the Iraqi chain of command, the more sclerotic the bureaucracy became. The advisers at each step in the chain of command became the parallel mechanism that insured the army functioned.

Administration, logistics and communications consumed the small advisory teams. Eleven-man advisory often didn't have the time or manpower to significantly affect combat operations. With at least half the battalion devoted to guard posts and traffic checkpoints, an Iraqi battalion with four companies and 260 soldiers present for duty controlled significantly less terrain than a 160-man US company.

Both employed the same tactics of patrols, searches and raids. The Iraqis were far superior in finding hidden weapons, and they reduced friction with the locals and developed more informants. Both forces, though, were military, not police, and detective work did not come naturally to a soldier.

When a battalion moved into an area, the insurgents did not abandon the struggle. They lingered, looking for an easy kill. In Fallujah after a berm was built around the city in early 2005, insurgents sneaked back in and repeatedly killed Iraqi officials, despite the American and Iraqi battalions stationed inside the city. Colonel Abbas, an Iraqi battalion commander in Fallujah, called the insurgents "the faceless ones". He didn't know who they were. He sent his Shiite soldiers on patrol and, like the Americans, they were shot at repeatedly while the locals kept silent. Iraqi battalions were as frustrated as the Americans by the "faceless ones".

The Iraqi Army was working, despite the selfishness of the higher headquarters. Like the Americans, the Iraqi Army provided a lid that prevented the insurgency from growing into a conventional force. Destroying AQI would take dogged police work for years.

Advisers went out of their way to caution me about appearances. Yes, the Army was on the right glide path. But wherever there was faltering, an adjacent or "partnered" American unit would take up the slack and correct the mistakes.

"The older officers, say 35 or 40, like the old system and don't want to change," Major Vos told me. "We're ten years from a new system. The test of a trained army is whether they behave the same when the advisers are not there. If we leave, this army will revert to its old self."

On his third tour, Vos, a Force Recon Marine, had done it all - trained Iraqi commandos, went through the battle of Fallujah with an Iraqi battalion, led Iraqi teams on special missions and operated from Baghdad to the Syrian border. Vos was saying what I heard repeated from Qaim to Fallujah to Baghdad: If left on their own, the Iraqi battalions would shrink inward, reverting to static outposts and conceding the streets.

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C. Small Unit Decision-making. To what degree do American small unit leaders make independent combat decisions, or should an insurgency be fought in accord with centralized direction?

Strategy in Washington is only tenuously connected to the realities of the violence in Iraq. The U.S. manages crises from the top down: The White House, the diplomats, and the generals seek to motivate Iraq's political leaders, who will presumably cajole the shadowy leaders of the Sunni insurgency and the Shiite militias. This is the model of the Washington policymaker: Power speaks to power, based on rank. Our best and brightest will craft a strategy calculated to persuade Nouri al-Maliki, the prime minister of Iraq, who putatively influences those below him.

The insurgents and the death squads, on the other hand, have no such hierarchical pyramid. An insurgency grows from the bottom up. A guerrilla who doesn't know his neighborhood stands out as though he were wearing a uniform. Indeed, if the insurgents did wear uniforms, the war would be over in a week. A few years ago, when Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi bumped into a checkpoint near Ramadi, he asked his driver what tribe controlled the area. He then leaped from his car and escaped via a local contact. Only later did our intelligence cells in Baghdad learn what had happened in that remote city. Insurgent militias survive by putting down local roots.

To put it bluntly, the philosophical convictions of 60-year-old executives have scant point of contact with the tribal nihilism of the 20-year-old killers embedded like ticks in local villages and city neighborhoods. The latter don't give a tinker's damn what the Gucci politicians cluck about in Baghdad. Maliki, coddled in the Green Zone, is a party politician installed by American force of arms. Unlike our Founding Fathers, he and his ilk were handed a democracy they did not fight to establish.

The streets outside the Green Zone are controlled by their enemies: killers whose souls have been corroded, and who will continue to murder, because that's what they do. They're not going to be won over by jobs cleaning streets or promises of oil-revenue sharing. Like the mafia, they have tasted power and they're not giving it back. They have to be put down, in jail or in the earth.

That's the role of our soldiers. They're the ones out on the streets, but the latitude for small unit leader decision-making has been problematical. In the two Fallujah battles in 2004, the sheer size of the fight dictated that company, platoon and squad commanders take charge. In 2006, the rifle companies, platoons and eleven-man Military Transition Teams or MiTTs often operated from independent combat outposts.

At the same time, force protection became a defining mission, with generals setting the rules for equipment to be worn and for convoy and patrol size. These

restrictions came about gradually. The very infrequency of American casualties resulted in intense media coverage whenever they did occur. The names and circumstances of each fatality were headline news, with individual photos shown every night on television.

The apparent intolerance of casualties by the American public and the Congress restricted the nature of combat operations and lower-level decisionmaking, as compared with Vietnam. During Vietnam, hundreds of American soldiers and Marines were listed as missing in action and later declared killed. If the terrorists had captured American soldiers in Iraq, their subsequent treatment would have been a dramatic and searing event. Consequently, strict rules were applied, and every American fatality and serious injury was subject to investigation.

In 2006, about 40 American battalions - roughly 800 men each - comprised the battle core of the 140,000 American force in Iraq. The soldiers in a battalion lived in air-conditioned concrete combat outposts (COPs) – usually abandoned schools and the like – and Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), with bunks, internet connections, TV, decent food and cold drinks. Every day and night they donned their armor, rode humvees or walked down the roads, dismounted and searched city blocks or wide swaths of farm fields.

Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, caused over 70% of American casualties. They were hidden in trash heaps and inside dead animals, dug into the dirt or buried under the macadam. Although the technological search for mechanisms to defeat the IED threat was enormous, the suspicious eyes of experienced soldiers remained the prime means of detecting IEDs before they detonated. At least half of all IEDs were detected and destroyed.

By 2006, the pace of direct face-to-face combat had slowed. In a few battalions, the soldiers were shot at every few days; in most battalions, firefights were rare, perhaps one every two or three months. Of 18 Marines randomly interviewed, 13 had shot at a positively identified insurgent during their tour in 2005, and only one had done so in 2006.

"They've learned how to avoid us," a Marine sergeant in the Fallujah-Ramadi corridor told me. "They shoot when we drive by, and we have no idea where the shot came from."

In 2005, we suffered 719 fatalities in Iraq and inflicted perhaps 4,000 fatalities on the insurgents. We could not win by attrition, because our political will was decreasing much faster than the insurgents' recruiting base. Our battalions kept a lid on the insurgency by patrols, cordons and raids. The insurgents countered by posing as civilians, posting lookouts and running away when the heat got too great.

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A bright spot in Baghdad was the performance of the special units. One night in September of 2006, I accompanied retired General Wayne Downing to a commando base. The American contractors, SEALs and Special Forces were happy to see Downing, who had commanded the Special Operations Command. As we watched, the commando teams, who fired thousands of rounds each month in practice, executed a rehearsal for a raid later that night. They flowed through the shooting rooms with choreographed ease, riddling the targets. Using a sand table and detailed photos, they meticulously rehearsed how they would take down that night's complex target.

On the wall of their operations center, a large map of Baghdad was sprinkled with bright red pins, showing the locations of 150 previous raids. One square chunk of the map - Sadr City, stronghold of the Mahdi Army - showed no pins. Asked about the omission, the commandos just laughed good-naturedly.

The advisers said the Iraqi commandos had no fear of al Qaeda or any other extremists. When the terrorists bolted from houses raided at three in the morning, the Iraqi commandos ran them down. Firefights were rare.

The commandos operated under the equivalent of national arrests warrants that gave them the right to pull a raid anywhere without informing a provincial governor. This greatly reduced leaks, and the teams enjoyed a success rate of over 60%, with more target houses than they could hit. There were not enough of them for the number of targets.

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While training such high-skilled soldiers takes years, our small unit leaders did adapt quickly without special training. One day I accompanied Lieutenant Brian Peoples, a savvy platoon commander in the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment, 101st Division, on patrol at the southeastern end of Baghdad where the Diyala River flowed into the Tigris. It was a densely settled area, with a Shiite majority concentrated in tightly packed houses and apartment buildings along the main highway into the city, and a Sunni minority living in the lush farmland along the Tigris. A few days earlier, Peoples' company had engaged in a heavy firefight near a Shiite mosque just off the main market. One soldier was killed and Peoples was looking out for information.

We jounced down a dirt road overgrown with vines, passing some burnt-out farms where Shiite militia had attacked isolated Sunni families, and stopped at a large house surrounded by palm trees on the riverbank. Peoples told me that occasionally the Sunni mukhtar who lived there provided tips about Shiite leaders.

"JAM (Jeish al Mahdi - the Mahdi Army) wants to burn them down," Peoples said. "So the mukhtar will dime them out."

We were greeted politely and sat on the patio, sipping sweet chai and chatting about recent murders and kidnappings. Peoples brought out a photo album and passed it around. The mukhtar's bodyguards peeked over his shoulder and exchanged comments. Of roughly 16 photos – most taken by soldiers from the 61st – the mukhtar picked out five. For the next half hour, he provided details of who lived where by pointing at houses on a large photomap, what pseudonyms they used and how they were connected. After we left, Peoples told me he now had three confirmed addresses and one key suspect.

"Some companies don't get COIN (counterinsurgency)," he said. "They ride around and park behind their .50 cals. They like looking mean. That gets you nowhere. Yeh, coming out here and mixing around, I get some shit. A sniper across the river shoots every time I come here. Some kids making their bones or some stupid thing. But this mukhtar's info is good. If we don't do this, we shouldn't be here."

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From Baghdad, I caught a series of helicopter and convoy rides northwest to the violent city of Haditha, where the Marine rifle commander was due to meet the police chief, after a swing through the market by the river.

"We get hit there every day," Captain Matt Tracy, the company commander, told me. "So we go there every day."

Our five humvees drove in single file past storefronts whose owners were hastily pulling down steel shutters. The street hadn't emptied of shoppers before the first shots cracked by from our rear. With no room to turn, we drove on and a few seconds later someone shot at us from a palm grove off to the right. Quick as a blink, half a dozen Marines tumbled out and rushed into the grove, Tracy and LtCol James Donnellan, the battalion commander, among them. Wary of snipers, the Marines darted from tree to tree, racing through the grove. Half an hour later, they returned to the humvees, dripping sweat from their helmets and sixty pounds of armor and gear. As usual, the shooters had escaped.

When we reached his combat outpost, Captain Tracy offered me a warm Coke.

"Sorry we have no cold drinks," he said, "We had two freezers, but a prisoner died two nights ago under Iraqi police interrogation. So we shipped the body in our freezer to the States for autopsy and investigation. Then yesterday we shot a guy running a checkpoint. He was on our wanted list, but we had to put him in the other freezer until battalion sends down an investigator. I'll use Clorox when we get our freezers back. Right now I have to deal with an angry police chief. We've been asking him how his prisoner died, and he doesn't like it."

Tracy walked outside and escorted a compact, unsmiling LtCol Farouk, the police chief, into his office, which consisted of a huge wall map, a cot, a desk and a small sofa. Farouk was boiling over.

"Every American is asking how one terrorist died," he said. "We questioned him, and he died. That's all I say. He betrayed my police. Their heads were tossed in the dirt in Bejii. And all you ask is how a terrorist died. You let him out of prison."

"We go by the law," Tracy said. "We have rules we follow."

"Rules? What about nine bodies without heads? My brother's body?' Farouk said. "My mother complains I have lost the family because I help Americans."

"Bejii's 70 kilometers from here," the battalion commander, LtCol James Donnellan, said. "I'll take a force there. You can come with me."

"How long?" Farouk demanded.

"Higher has to coordinate," Donnellan said. "Two or three days."

"The bodies will be gone by then. You investigate a dead terrorist right away. But my brother has to wait," Farouk said. "Your rules? You won't see strong police the American way for a hundred years."

Farouk went on at length, explaining whom he was fighting. The hard, clever ones on the other side, in his view, weren't the jihad extremists. Instead, he threw out the names of a few colonels he said he had served with when they seized Kuwait. These men, he said, had money and knew how to organize. Once the Americans were gone, they were convinced they could crush the jihadists and reassert their old power. They were the ones standing back and watching the movement of the Americans and police from city to city. They were the ones who sent AQI foot soldiers and suicide bombers wherever they believed the police were gaining a foothold. They paid for the killings.

"I know you're pissed," Tracy said. "We came here, we made promises, then we left. Now you're back and we're back. I'm moving in right next to you in this compound. Your police are welcome to come over to watch TV with my Marines and help themselves to the snacks. We'll go on every patrol with you. I want one of your officers in my watch center. We'll run operations together. We'll do this together."

The next moring, a police officer showed up for the day shift. Captain Bert Lewis, the air officer, was monitoring a screen showing a video feed from an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) loitering over the city.

"Check that dude next to the white Nissan," he said, speaking into a handset.

An operator several miles away zoomed in the UAV camera. On the screen, we watched a man in a white dishdasha hastily scooping dirt over a boxy package, while cars passed by without slowing down.

"FedEx delivery," Lewis said, to general laughter as a half dozen Marines and the Iraqi cop crowded forward for a closer look. "I don't believe this dude."

The Nissan drove away as the man finished packing dirt around the improvised explosive device, or IED.

"Follow the car or the man-dress?" Lewis asked.

"Nail that sucker," Lieutenant Joshua Booth said. (Booth was shot and killed the following week, leading his platoon down a city street.)

The man looked up and down the street, and then ran south. The picture tilted, then zoomed in, holding him in the center of the frame. A series of black numbers scrolled along the right edge, updating the GPS coordinates. The target, solidly built and in his mid-thirties, had left the road and was now running along the riverbank.

More marines clustered around the screen to watch. The man was running hard, back rigid, chest out. "Look, he's doubling back." He kept looking over his shoulder to see if he was being followed. He must have heard the UAV's high-pitched whine—it's like the drone of a monster mosquito—but he didn't look up. He ran down a path between houses, across a field, and back to the riverbank. After fifteen minutes, he slowed to a walk, then stopped and stood with his hands on his knees.

"Sucking wind. Get the coordinates to the QRF. Get the cops on this."

The police officer shouted in Arabic into his handheld radio. Within minutes, a Quick Reaction Force patrol closed on the GPS coordinates, the fugitive sat down in the shade of a palm tree, beckoning to someone on the river. Just as a square-nosed wooden skiff punted up to the man, the QRF, mounted in two Humvees, converged on the riverbank. The man scrambled to his feet, saw he had no place to run, and half-raised his arms to show he had no weapon.

"A twofer! All right! Send a squad to pick those guys up and bring them here."

The Iraqi police hopped into their pickups to follow the heavily armored American Humvees roaring off to pick up the two prisoners. The police would do the initial interrogating to try to roll up the white Nissan, then the prisoners would be charged and driven to higher headquarters.

The chase was a demonstration of American technology and partnership with the Iraqi security forces at the small unit level. The battalion commander, LtCol James Donnellan, trusted Tracy to operate his 140-man company to conduct independent operations from a base five miles from the battalion headquarters. This was common at the company level throughout Iraq. Higher headquarters would establish the parameters, especially the wearing of armor and the minimum number of humvees and Americans permitted on patrol, and leave it to the company commander to conduct operations without daily supervision.

Although there was no established technique for identifying the residents in any locale, many rifle companies eventually decided to take their own census in their individual areas of operations. It was common to visit companies that had 150 or more names and photos entered in Power Point or on an Excel spreadsheet.

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I talked with four squad leaders from one battalion who had deployed in 2005 to Afghanistan and had just finished seven months in Haditha. The Marines in their four squads had seen dozens of insurgents in civilian clothes, about half wearing masks, but only for a few seconds at a time. They had six confirmed kills in four squads (about 45 men) in seven months. All preferred night raids.

"Calling in Arabic names over the radio takes forever," Dunn said. "We worked for days building our census. Language all the time was a real barrier. But those terps (interpreters) do what we grunts do, and their families are threatened. I've got real respect for them. They're the stand-up guys in Iraq."

The American battalions applied the conventional-war tactics of patrols, cordons and raids, while the insurgents hid among the people and their leaders pulled out when the Americans advanced. The raid, based on hard intelligence, was the best tool, and required relatively few troops. Patrolling was the daily staple. Three thousand patrols each day kept a lid on the violence - and created a never-ending parade of targets for IEDs.

The word commonly heard from the grunts was "frustrating" - the frustration of being shot at and blown up without being able to strike back, and without seeing progress.

One hot afternoon in Habbineah, 80 miles northwest of Baghdad, on a break from patrol, I gathered together a few dozen Marines who were on their second and third tours. The Marines knew every path and every street in the village. They didn't know the people.

"They shoot, and we have no idea where the shot came from," Lance Corporal Robert A. Montgomery said. "It was cleaner on our last tour. On large sweeps, we had a forward line of troops and knew where we could fire. Our morale was

higher then. Now we have all kinds of restrictions. They're (the enemy) invisible. It's hard to kills a ghost. It'll go on and on."

All four - Sgts. Michael Dunn, Teodoro Ramos, Joseph Kolniak and Rogelio Rodriguez - preferred the Afghanistan tour, saying that the people were friendly and hard-working, despite harsh conditions and abysmal poverty.

"Their soldiers had heart," Ramos said. "Not in Iraq. The Sunnis won't join the army. They're concerned only with their own families. They want security, but don't want to pay for it. Someone else can be the cop. We get shot at and they don't tell us a thing. In Afghanistan, the Taliban snipe at us from long distance up in the mountains. They're not hiding in the villages using IEDs. It's much more shooting engagements over there."

It appeared the insurgents were not being substantially attrited by American firepower.

"They shadow us, " 1/Lt Nathan Smith of Kilo Company told me in Habbineah. "They know exactly where we are and where our unit boundaries are. Before they attack, they put on masks so they can run home after they take a few shots and we can't identify them. They live right here. We just don't know who they are."

"They shoot only when they have a canal or some barrier between us and them," Capt Tim Anderson, the Kilo Company commander, added.

The combat in Anbar had changed since the direct, hard fights in 2004-2005. The insurgents were avoiding firefights against the Marines, while using IEDs and snipers to inflict casualties. In one day while I was accompanying Kilo Company on its patrols, these incidents occurred:

1. White station wagon with civilians hit by IED
2. Scout-sniper team engaged AIF (Anti-Iraqi Forces) on east bank of Euphrates. Killed two.
3. SBVIED (Suicide Bomb Vehicle IED) detonated prematurely on Michigan, killing driver.
4. 120mm mortar shell found.
5. IED attack on tank - mobility kill; tank towed back to base.
6. 4-door gray car stopped on Michigan, driver waved to Marine, passengers opened fire. Car drove away. No casualties.
7. Three rounds of 82mm mortar exploded outside COP (Combat Outpost)

Lance Corporal Mason Jones told me his platoon took fire three times from one house across a canal. Finally, a fire team sneaked across at three in the morning and rousted the owner out of bed. The man was trembling, but refused to say

who occasionally took a shot from his roof. "You won't kill me," he said. "They will."

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From Habbineah, I caught a helo hop northwest to Rawah, a small city on the Euphrates, about 100 miles from the Syrian border. LtCol Sparky Renforth, commanding the 2d LAR, had his headquarters in a camp outside the city, while most his LAV (Light Armored Vehicle) companies were scattered across hundreds of miles of desert. Renforth, like many others, was on his third tour. He was focused on building up the police and Iraqi Army.

"I'm beginning to get a tribal leader involved in this town," he said. "That's the secret to standing up the police."

He sent me to a lonely, muddy outpost out of town on the only highway leading to Syria. There, SSgt Jason Richardson was trying to mold an Iraqi platoon from the Shiite city of Nasariah into a fighting unit alongside his Marine platoon. It wasn't easy going. The Marines and Iraqi soldiers (jundis) were living in dingy wooden bunkers with mud floors, enclosed by mounds of soggy sandbags. It reminded me of bunkers along the DMZ in Vietnam in 1967.

"We get hit every day with mortars," he said. "We can take that. But the jundis want to live better than we do, and do less work. They're scared, so they shoot a lot when they don't have to. I won't let them stand guard duty at the TCP (traffic control point) without my Marines. They steal stuff from the cars."

I left Richardson to visit at the police station downtown. It had been hit a few days before by a suicide bomber and new Hesco barriers were being filled. Inside the station, a Marine company had set up an operations center and the Marines were busy entering census data on a Microsoft Access form they had designed. They were running eight joint patrols a day, with a minimum of eight Marines in each. Their problem was they only had two interpreters.

I talked with the police chief, Mohamed Jasim, who told me his 13 police kept their families in Baghdad and Mosul.

"The people talk to me," he said. "My biggest enemy is Hamas Abdul. He comes from al Qaim area and sneaks in here by boat, stirring people up, saying the police are traitors. I don't know what he looks like, but I'll get him one day. My problem is we catch the irihabeen and they go away (to prison) and are sent back, even when we have witnesses. It's bad."

Jasim was expecting the sheik in Qaim to send him reinforcements. In the meantime, he relied on the Marines to keep him alive.

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How could thirteen cops in the downtown station of a town of about 10,000 make a difference? I asked Kevin Austin, 35, who had volunteered to serve for seven months as a member of the civilian police advisory program. Austin was in civilian life a detective with the California Highway Patrol.

"The Iraqi police system is all in their heads," said. "The cops match names and faces. We could never do that. It's based on local knowledge. They don't have any equipment – no way to take or match fingerprints, no computer, no contact with a higher system that gives them feedback on who they've arrested. There's a lot we can do to exploit their local knowledge, though."

How can local knowledge defeat an insurgency? What techniques was he advising the Iraqi police to use?

"First, develop sources on the streets," Austin said. "Understand the social networks, who lives where. These cops are good at that. They grew up here. They're members of the local tribe. Second, grill one insurgent until he betrays another. Then move fast to make the next arrest. You're going to have to arrest four or five hundred guys and put them away before the tribes say, don't work for AQI. Third, impose fines for criminal offenses. The foot soldiers are in this for money. Down in Haditha, the AQI says no payoffs unless the IP are driven out of town. Well, one hundred bucks to emplace an IED is not worth having your car or house confiscated. Hit them in the pocketbook. I define success six months from now would be the police pulling night raids on their own intell. Sure, they'll still need the Marines, but more for firepower than doing it for them."

"I know the idea is that the army will provide security for the police, not the Marines," Maj Eric Glassie, the chief adviser, added. "But that means two kings in one city, squabbling over one rice bowl. It's not the Iraqi way. We have to straighten out who does what and who has the real power."

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On the streets in Baghdad and in Anbar, the extremists hold the offense, while the Iraqi security forces lack confidence. The key to changing that is small unit leadership.

"Iraq is like a peasant army in 18th Century Europe," Major David Lane, an experienced adviser, told me. "A whole company responds to one officer. If he's weak, a hundred men are out of the fight."

In each city, you need a tough police chief or military commander who has local knowledge and zero tolerance. That Iraqi commander, in turn, needs combat advisers both for instilling basic staff procedures for organization, logistics and

living conditions and operational planning and to be out on the streets at the point of battle, for reasons of projecting confidence in winning the ten-second firefights.

At the end of 2006, this was where the American small unit leaders could make the largest difference: partnering with the Iraqi soldiers and police, and making independent combat decisions. To fight an insurgency required a central organizing concept of operations that maximized the relative advantages of American small unit leaders: initiative and self-confidence based on sound training ("be brilliant in the basics") and the knowledge that they are part of a larger system that will support and reinforce them.

The American advisers know they are not out there alone; behind them is a vast system that will move heaven and hell to support them. The problem with the Iraqi forces is that they know they *are* out there alone. More cohesion, though, is being shown at the Iraqi battalion level. The challenges are persuading the higher elements to support the battalions.

On the police side, the challenge is starker. In Anbar, the remedy, ironically, may be easier than in Baghdad. In each of nine key cities, one tough police chief can make a large difference, without having to tie in daily with a higher chain of command. In the capitol, every district has to be tied to the others, requiring vertical command and control, a distinct weakness with roots in sectarian politics that is harder to overcome.

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D. Nature of the War. Is Iraq an insurgency or a sectarian civil war, and does that make a difference in how the war is fought?

After Baghdad fell in April of 2003, our military undertook a strategy of attrition to finish off the "dead enders", the presumably few die-hards left over from Saddam's regime.

That effort failed as the Sunni insurgency grew due to a collusion of interests among six groups. First, former regime elements (FRE) with ample finances and extensive contacts and experience rebelled with the intent of reestablishing Sunni-based Baathist power. Second, FRE recruited the unemployed former soldiers desperate for money and disaffected by neglect. Third, in a tribal society, revenge and affronted honor motivated many impoverished and uneducated youths to plant an IED or take a shot at the infidel American invaders in order to drive them out of their cities, make a little money and earn bragging rights in the community. Fourth, the Sunni imams, who regained considerable power after governance collapsed in April of 2003, preached virulent anti-American messages and encouraged sedition. The Salafist extremists among the imams enthusiastically endorsed violence. Fifth, Saddam had released thousands of hardened criminals who joined the insurgency for profit. Sixth, al Qaeda and

foreign fighters came to Iraq to fight and establish a 13th Century caliphate, establishing a movement called al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) that was 90% Sunni Iraqi. By 2004, the insurgency posed a serious threat in Baghdad and throughout the Sunni Triangle stretching north and west from Baghdad.

General George W. Casey took command of all coalition forces in late July of 2004. He and the commander of the Central Command, General John Abizaid, believed that the presence on the streets of American soldiers antagonized the Sunni population. They strove for a strategy that imposed a "light footprint" while providing security. It was a balance never achieved. The following excerpt from a July 2004 story by Christian Science Monitor reporter Ann Tyson captured the essence of the dilemma:

"The escalation of violence in Ramadi presents a difficult Catch-22 for US commanders here who are working to reduce the visibility of US troops, empower Iraq's new government, and get security forces to take charge.

"Our presence does create violence, but our lack of presence could also create violence - maybe even more," says Maj. John Harrill, operations officer for the 2nd Battalion 4th Marines, the 1,000-strong force in Ramadi. "Every decision to reduce our presence or get out has to be at the right time," he says.

As US forces shrink their "footprint," cutting back sharply on neighborhood patrols and raids on certain roads, Iraqi security forces have often proven spotty at best in asserting control. Balancing the political imperative of scaling back the US troop presence - and its lingering images of occupation - with the military campaign against insurgents and terrorists, is perhaps nowhere as critical as here in Anbar Province."

In 2005, Casey emphasized a three-pronged counterinsurgency strategy called "Clear, Hold & Build". In a series of extended operations, American forces "cleared" most Sunni population centers of overt insurgent presence. This didn't mean the insurgents abandoned the cities; it did mean they would not come into the open and challenge the Americans to a gunfight. Other bands of insurgents still roamed the highways and hid in remote farm regions. Hijackings and payoffs on the roads were common, and organized gangs imposed levies with the exactitude of actuaries

The Americans could clear any stronghold. The second step - to "hold" the cities - meant arresting the insurgents hiding in plain sight among the population. That did not happen. In the Sunni cities, the Sunni police were too scared, or cooperated with the insurgents. When the American forces left, the insurgents flowed back in, killed any police who resisted, intimidated the rest and took control. This led to what the troops called "whack-a-mole", rushing from city to

city as the insurgents gathered their forces wherever there were the fewest American soldiers.

The third piece of the strategy - to "build" basic services, reduce unemployment and offer economic growth -- stalled out, due to insurgent destruction and to corruption endemic in a society where higher rank was used to enrich the family and the tribe.

Despite the Clear, Hold & Build strategy, the insurgents kept control over most of the population within the Sunni Triangle and the Sunni neighborhoods in the Baghdad area. There was one irrefutable measure of this control: soldiers and police dared not go home in uniform or tell their neighbors how they made a living.

By the fall of 2006, the coalition was engaged in a two-front war: against insurgents in the Sunni Triangle and n and around Baghdad, against the Sunnis and Shiites killing each other by the dozens each day, while the Shiite police, ineffectual and often complicit, had lost the trust of the people. Only the presence of American and Iraqi soldiers prevented the violence from escalating out of control. Both Sunni insurgents and Shiite death squads avoided direct clashes with the American units, forcing those units to rely upon raids and arrests to break up the insurgent and militia gangs.

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The American and Iraqi judicial systems, however, were not prepared for this type of police war and failed to arrest and imprison the insurgents. Captain Matt Swinlde, on the G-2 staff of the Marine Expeditionary Force outside Fallujah, succinctly illustrated to me the problem.

"RCT (Regimental Combat Team) 5 arrests about 150 very bad guys a month," Swindle said. "But we have set up so many review procedures, combined with a dysfunctional Iraqi judicial system, that most detainees are set free. Worse, many go to Gladiator School (meaning prison) for three to five months, then are sprung. Only now they have become part of a network and know how to make IEDs. I'm training our Marines to be mini-CSI in the midst of a war. If I don't, the arrests don't stick. We don't have the resources for a US military judicial system on the scale needed. Last week, for instance, a regimental op took in seventy serious detainees. We can't process them all in 18 days like we're required to do. A lot of them will walk free."

The city of Fallujah was both evidence of progress and of the problem in sustaining momentum. In the spring of 2004, Sunni generals from Saddam's era persuaded the Marines that they could recruit a reliable home guard from among the "honorable resistance" inside the city. The Marines agreed to turn the city over to this home guard, called the "Fallujah brigade". Within a month, the arch

terrorist Zarqawi and AQI had hacked, bombed and bribed their way to power inside the city. Fallujah descended into hell, with public beatings, torture and beheadings. The former generals fled in disgrace, while the extremists, ruthless and implacable, held power until driven out in savage street fighting in late 2004.

After the battle, to prevent insurgents from sneaking back in the entire city was enclosed behind a large earth berm, with six checkpoints. Over the next two years, two Iraqi battalions moved in, while the American presence gradually dropped from eight rifle companies inside the city to one.

I went back to Fallujah in October of 2006 - my sixth visit to the city in three years - and checked in with the 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. The ops officer, Maj Rich Russo, told me the battalion arrested about 35 a month; the Iraqi battalion working alongside arrested 20; and the Sunni police arrested 7. He said most were released.

"The AQI in this city has a secret police and assassination squad in the city," LtCol Chris Landro, the battalion commander, said. "The Iraqi police have no jail. They turn someone over to us to transport to Baghdad, and Baghdad doesn't want them. We need a new model - one that doesn't let detainees come back and kill those that sent them away."

I stayed downtown with Charlie Company. In seven months, the company had 90 engagements. Of 110 Marines in the company, 30 had been wounded and three killed. Twelve Iraqi police working with the company had also been killed.

One night I accompanied Major Vaughn Ward on patrol, responding to a tip about an IED. We rode slowly through the deserted streets, the Marines warily surveying the trash heaps.

"We find an IED about once a day," Ward said. "Lost a Marine to a sniper on this street last week. I've been here seven months. We don't know who the killers are. It's like holding water in your hand."

Ward was referring to his battle with the assassins. About once a week, a Marine, Iraqi soldier, cop, or leading citizen would be shot. In June, I had walked with Ward through the souk to the trestle bridge where the four American contractors were lynched and burned in March of 2004, igniting nine months of heavy fighting. In October, Ward wouldn't go into the souk without armor and .50 caliber machineguns. From among the buildings and stalls jammed side by side, an unseen sniper would take a single shot. The Marines would rush building to building. No resident ever saw or heard a thing.

In Charlie Company, relationships with the police had steadily improved over the months, but one in three of the sixty-odd mosques remained hostile, with the imams preaching anti-government rhetoric

The top Marine in the city, Colonel Larry Nicholson, met weekly with the city council. After a year in Fallujah, and with a scar across his neck where the insurgents had tried to kill him, he was direct in his approach. "When Zarqawi controlled Fallujah, he whipped people and cut off heads," Nicholson said. "We Marines aren't going to fight for you forever. You have to help your own police force. Stand up for yourselves."

But every time a leader spoke out against the insurgents, he was marked for assassination. The city council chairman was killed in February. After several attempted assassinations, in May the mayor fled to Syria. In June, the newspaper editor was shot in the head because he wrote that the city would fall to the insurgents if the Marines left. That same month, the deputy police chief was murdered. When the police arrested two men for murder, a local judge hastily dismissed the charges. In protest, half the police force walked off the job for several days. In August, the police chief moved to a job in Baghdad.

Still, each time someone was killed, someone else would step forward. I believed this was due to the presence of the Marine base just outside the city, and to the dogged Marine determination to keep trying, day after day.

Between March and September, Charlie Company detained 120 suspects. Twenty-four were sent to prison. The rest walked free because the evidence was deemed insufficient to persuade Iraqi judges who were skeptical of Americans. In a gesture of reconciliation, during the summer Maliki released several thousand prisoners. Seven hundred returned to Fallujah, where many had been picked up during the heavy battles of late 2004. Subsequently, insurgent snipers killed three Marines. To imprison 24 while releasing 700, Colonel Nicholson said, was "outrageous".

Two sergeants in Ward's company were reservists who were cops back in the States. Both said those released kept their prisoner bracelets in their wallets for bragging rights when they met for tea in the market. Both urged a policy of zero tolerance, with consistent arrests and imprisonments. Both cops urged a crackdown, with a serious number of arrests.

The Iraqi police, however, were making few arrests. "First, they have to stay alive," Nicholson told me. "The new chief - Kareem - has told his men to sleep in the barracks. You can't be a decent cop in this city and expect to go home at night."

Fear hung like a fog over the city. The American presence hadn't cracked the extremists' control inside the Sunni cites. Nicholson put his finger on the irony. Most of the population shrugged when the Marines were attacked, yet wanted them to prevent Zarqawi-type AQI extremists from again taking over the city.

Cody Westin, a remarkable State Department diplomat who had lived in Fallujah for two years, offered an explanation. "Baghdad gives no money to Anbar. No one trusts the government," he said. "The police go without pay and wear masks. The status quo is not working."

To get another point of view, I spent several hours with "Sammy", a 28 year-old local interpreter from Baghdad who had come to Fallujah in October of 2003 with the 82d Airborne and had stayed with seven different US battalions since. He was paid about $1100 a month and had his own room in the barracks with the Marines, visiting his family every six weeks. I had known Sammy for two years.

"You're an interpreter, everyone in Iraq hates you," he said, echoing what I heard many times from other interpreters. "When I go home, I hide and I lie. The Iraqi army wouldn't help me, and the police would betray me. So would my neighbors. Everyone hates anyone who helps the Americans. That's the way it is. It's like we betray Iraq if we work for you."

"This city (Fallujah) was lost in February of 2004, when Janabi and the Salafists attacked the police station. They said the police were working with the infidels. They killed 24 cops and released maybe a hundred prisoners. That changed the power in the city. The Marines lost respect after Fallujah I (May 2004, when the Marines turned the city over to "the Fallujah brigade" and Zarqawi seized power). After Fallujah II, (November 2004) they learned they cannot f--- with Marines. They hate Marines. You have to be tough."

"It makes no difference if you Americans work with the sheiks or not. You pay them and nothing changes. The ECPs (Entrance Control Points) are a joke. Everyone has a false ID. You can buy a real passport for $400. The iriahabeen get back in."

"The IA (Iraqi Army) here don't think they're strong enough. They need you Americans. AQI attacked the IP (police) starting two months ago, because the IP started to work with you."

"It's all about money. The guys in Syria have the money. The family of a suicide bomber gets $20,000. This city has a shura (an insurgent council), about six or seven groups. Only one is al Qaeda. That's the hardest core. The rest come from around here. The shop owners know who they are."

"I'm just back from Baghdad. Well-educated Shiites are saying you Americans are working against them with the Sunni insurgents. Jeish al Mahdi is seen as heroes protecting Shiites. It's wild stuff there. You wouldn't believe how educated people believe all bad rumors about you Americans. Out here in Anbar, it's simpler. Most of them just hate you. That's how they are. You Americans got to be tough."

The nature of the war in the Sunni Triangle started with the simmering Sunni resentment at the American overthrow of their centuries of domination over the Shiites. The Sunni Triangle was scarcely touched by the swift invasion of 2003. The Sunnis did not consider themselves defeated. Supporting or encouraging those attacking Americans was considered legitimate. The American retreat from Fallujah in May of 2004 was particularly unfortunate, because it symbolized that America could be challenged and defeated.

In 2005, AQI gained power in cities throughout Anbar and the rest of the Triangle. Eventually, they were driven out by American firepower. In 2006, battalions of the Iraqi Army were moving into Sunni cities alongside American units. While many Sunnis were convinced the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad was in league with the Iran, some Sunni elders were convinced it was time to accept the new order and get on with a normal life. AQI and many of the other "resistance" gangs, however, persisted in murdering anyone who cooperated with the Americans or the Iraqi army.

The war in the Sunni Triangle was an insurgency. The guerrillas hid among the people in the cities, or in the outlying farm areas. A political accommodation between the Sunnis and the Shiite-controlled government could substantially reduce the violence. Even if that happened, arrests and imprisonment on a scale five times the current rate would be required. And to do that, the Sunni police in the cities would have to be convinced they were going to win and not be assassinated.

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The other front in the war was the sectarian killings in greater Baghdad.

In the summer of 2003, the terrorist Zarqawi began to murder masses of Shiites in order to provoke a civil war. He planned to use the ensuing chaos to establish his 13th Century caliphate in the Sunni Triangle. After his death in May of 2006, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) continued to launch assassins and suicide bombers from its lairs, prominently including the farmlands southwest of the city.

In February of 2006, the destruction of a Shiite mosque in Samara touched off the Shiite retaliations Zarqawi had hoped for. Shiite death squads randomly kidnapped and murdered Sunnis. The Shiite police, riddled with militia members, did nothing to stop the killings.

Establishing a police force was the responsibility of the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003-2004, and then of the State Department in 2005. Both failed miserably. General Casey had ordered the US military to assign advisers to the Iraqi Army starting in 2005. It was a year later before State transferred to the military oversight for the police, including budget, training and the embedding of advisers. For too long, the police had been neglected and left without

supervision. The consequence was that the police in Baghdad were among the most wretched in the world. New York City police sends 60,000 criminals to prison in a year. Baghdad police, with 20 times the murder rate, sends perhaps 2,000.

Casey had planned to pull two American brigades out of Baghdad in June of 2006, leaving only one. Instead, when Baghdad teetered on falling apart under relentless Sunni bombings and retaliatory Shiite executions, he had to send in the equivalent of two more brigades. The Iraqi Army was incapable of acting alone. It was the American soldiers who prevented the sectarian violence from escalating to Jacobin proportions of terror. On the other hand, the violence did not abate. Month after month, the killings went on.

The size of the task was daunting. In late September, Colonel Michael Beech, commanding a brigade in the 4th Infantry Division, escorted me through the Sunni district of Doura, row upon row of lower and middle class houses, with humvees and police checkpoints at the end of each street. Beech had deployed one American rifle company and an Iraqi Police (IP) company per two 'mulahas', or city blocks containing 1300 houses and about 17,000 people. At that rate, it would take 140,000 soldiers to control the city of seven million. The US had committed 14,000 and the Iraqis had 40,000 police and soldiers on the rolls in Baghdad. How many of those were present for duty and on the streets was not clear.

"We show a presence and that has cut down the murders in Doura from over a hundred to one every few days," Beech said. "We can't do it for them forever, though.The question is whether the Iraqi politicians want their own police to succeed."

Beech said his intelligence was excellent, resulting in many arrests. The problem was that Shiite militia leaders were released by the Iraqi government after Beech arrested them.

The streets were remarkably clean, because Beech had an allowance to hire garbage trucks. The 14,000 US soldiers assigned to Baghdad had a total fund of $50 million. The idea was to clear and hold an area, then provide some basic services under the belief that by so doing, the people would support the government and not a Shiite militia or a Sunni insurgent group.

Speaking on The News Hour in October, LtGen Peter Chiarelli, Commanding General, Multinational Corps Iraq, said: "I think the whole idea of war has changed forever. This is a different war than the United States has ever fought. We're fighting an enemy that blends in to the population, an enemy that has no fixed numbers. And it requires U.S. forces to move from kinetic things to use more non-kinetic elements. I can help the Iraqi government make sure that fresh, potable water works, that sewage systems work, that electricity works ... if we

can have the people in Iraq believe that their life is getting better in those four or five areas, it will make Iraq a much more secure country."

At the Multi-national Force (MNF) operations center, the generals were briefed daily on four measures: Security and Transportation, Economy, Commerce and Governance. The tag line on the first slide read: "Restoration of services will decrease support for AIF (Anit-Iraqi Forces)."

It was a provocative hypothesis. Beech and I chatted with some of the residents in Doura, who offered no opinion about the garbage pick-up, but were quick to insist the Americans had to stay.

"The Ministry of Interior are the killers. They sent police here. They picked up our friend the other day. He was walking down the street and a police car took him away. They killed him," Maha Daoud Saeh, an electrician, said. "They shot the transformers so we'd move out."

"There's no power," Beech told me. " The health clinic's closed. Sadr's party controls the health ministry. So is the bank. The Sunnis here see the insurgents, even al Qaeda, as protection from the JAM (Jaish al Mahdi, a militia organized by Malktada Sadr) after we leave."

Beech was impressed with his counterpart, Brigadier General Kareem. "I've been partnered with 23 Iraqi units and Kareem's National Police (NP) are the best. The problem is they don't want to walk a beat. They're SWAT types."

Beech said it was amazing to watch the screaming matches between senior police and army officers, but that was their cultural style. The army distrusted the police and kept them at a distance, but opposed any type of martial law that would put them in charge. It was easier to blame the police.

Beech pulled his soldiers out of Doura in late September and early October; within a month, Doura deteriorated and killings and bombings again became commonplace.

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To the west of Doura, the approaches to Baghdad from the province of Anbar were controlled by the 3rd Brigade of the 6th Division. The commander, Colonel Nair Ahmed Ghanam, made no pretext of his opinion of the police.

"I don't want the police under my command," Ghanam said. "Sure, there are a lot of them, but they do nothing. The jundis I receive are so badly trained I have to retrain them. Don't send me more bodies; send me machine-guns and sniper rifles and armored vehicles. I have only junk."

Ghanam, a resident of Baghdad and member of a distinguished Sunni military family, had a legitimate complaint. The Iraqi Minister of Defense in 2004, Hazem Shaalan and his comptroller, Zyad Cattan, paid $1.3 billion for junk weapons from Egypt, Pakistan and Poland - armored cars that couldn't stop a rifle bullet, machine-guns priced at $3,500 each and produced for $200, AK bullets purchased for 16 cents and manufactured for four cents, with high failure rates. Shaalan and Cattan skipped the country after pulling off one of the biggest thefts in history.

Colonel Ghanam was authorized 2,500 soldiers and had present for duty about 1,800. Of three battalions, he had one in training, one manning twelve fixed check points on the highways leading into Baghdad, and one conducting patrols and raids. His brigade had arrested and sent to higher headquarters about 1,000 insurgents in the past 18 months, but he had no idea how many were sent away.

Ghanam was responsible for the Abu Ghraib farming district southwest of Baghdad, a vast Sunni area of back roads and more than 15,000 isolated houses sitting in the middle of one acre plots, separated from one another by irrigation ditches and dense palm groves. This was the lair of the al Qaeda gangs that imported the suicide murderers, packed the cars with explosives and scouted the markets and mosques for targets.

"Of course the people know who the terrorists are among them, Look, there are areas out there where Iraqi soldiers have never been, It's too big, " Ghanam said. "The terrorists are not religious. For them, it's all about money and power. We have to take the (Sunni) people away from them by reworking the Constitution. Don't you Americans leave now. Finish making the new army. Then we'll take over the security. The army, not the police."

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Over dinner in late September, General Casey said that some Sunni resistance groups had indicated they would cease firing if Baghdad offered a deal. In a gesture of reconciliation, American generals met with representatives of at least seven groups who claimed to be "honorable resistance". Casey indicated he thought they were serious. But their terms amounted to emerging as the victors.

He explained that his priorities centered around persuading the Shiite leaders to enfranchise the Sunnis and give them a stake in the future of the country. He was concentrating upon modifying the stricture against hiring former Baathists, securing oil revenue-sharing for the Sunnis, modifying the constitution to place limits on extreme federalism and disarming the militias – all notably political tasks.

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Senior American diplomats echoed the same concerns about the Iraqi government stepping forward. As the Americans instituted computerized checks on accounts, more officials were refusing to sign off on the release of money for fear they would be held accountable for discrepancies. Combined with the pervasive instinct to hoard, this slowed the expenditure rates required to meet payrolls and other normal expenses.

To our diplomats, the energy system had proved particularly vexing. "There's an emerging class of oligarchs who gain by manipulating power and oil outages," Deputy Chiief of Mission Dan Speckhard said. "They pay off the political parties and are untouchable." The oil sector was losing about four billion dollars a year to corruption up and down the line, a quilt work of thieving officials, insurgents, political parties and criminals.

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In Baghdad, the day-to-day job of security fell to the police, who were failing.

"Nine cities are key to Iraq," Brigadier General Joseph Peterson, in charge of police training, told me. "Mosul, Tal Afar, Tikrit, Kirkuk, Ramadi, Fallujah, Basra and Baghdad. The center of gravity is Baghdad."

Peterson believed that by the end of 2006, about 200,000 trained police would be available for duty - 28,000 on the borders, 25,000 in National Police battalions (SWAT-type missions) and 135,000 street cops, all paid by the Ministry of Interior. In addition, 27 ministries and eight independent agencies employed armed guards. Eventually, all were supposed to come under the direction of MOI, which would then have about 400,000 under arms, compared to 150,000 in the military.

The goal was to distribute the police according to force ratios: 1:300 - 400 in low threat areas, and 1:200 in high threat areas, with Anbar receiving 1:100. Anbar had a distinct shortfall in Sunni recruits for the army or the police. In Baghdad where there were 135,000 unemployed military-age males and an estimated 5,000 hard-core criminals, there were 25,000 police (plus 10,000 traffic police), a ration of 1:300. In New York City, the ratio was 1:150.

Peterson attributed the murders, or Extra-Judicial Killings (EJK) in Baghdad to Shiite militias rather than the police. As to the quality of the police, he acknowledged their arrest rate was about one-eighth that of the US, as was the imprisonment rate.

In fact, the Iraqi police were terrible by any standard. The US was holding about 13,000 in prisons in Iraq, and the Iraqis were holding about 14,000. In 1970, when South Vietnam had the internal insurgency under control, 34,000 Viet Cong

were imprisoned, 4,000 were chiieu hois who had come over to the government side, and 10,000 were in 254 district and province jails. Adjusted for population differences, that was equivalent to holding 80,000, vice 14,000, in Iraq.

During the 50 days that included my trip in September and October, US and Iraqi forces in Baghdad killed 110 and captured 1,330 If that rate were duplicated in Anbar and in the rest of the Sunni Triangle, that would amount to 78 detained per day, or 29,000 for the year. Instead, the Iraqi and American imprisonments were close to flat since a release of 2,500 prisoners in a gesture of reconciliation during the summer of 2006.

"We need justice reform; it's the biggest defect," Peterson told me. "We're not imprisoning the way the situation demands."

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The southern approach to Bagdad was controlled by the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment, 101st Division, commanded by LtCol Brian Winski. I had first met Winski with the 101st in Mosul and had spent time with his unit several months earlier in Baghdad. His cavalry were responsible for the Rustinafiah area along the southern approach to Baghdad, a battle space 35 X 35 kilometers, holding 500,000 people, mostly Shiite but with a sizable Sunni minority mixed in.

The battalion, not partnered with an Iraqi unit, spent 30% of its time on household chores and self-security, 40% of mounted patrols and 30% on raids, mostly against JAM (Jesh al Mahdi) targets. Working separately in the area was a National Police brigade with an authorized strength of 1200 and an on-board strength of 750. 80% of the NP were on fixed sites, and three times a week Winski ran a joint op with whatever NP were available.

We drove by a modest police station tucked behind the usual Hesco barriers.

"That cost a million bucks, ten times what I was paying in 2003," Winski said. "Costs are crazy. I could fix a school then for 3500 bucks; now it's 35,000."

We passed a gas station with a line of cars that stretched for a mile.

"I have nine legal gas stations for half a million people," Winski said. "I know JAM controls who gets what, but no one will drop a dime and explain the deal to me."

Unlike in most of Iraq, Winski's humvees drove along slowly, allowing Iraqi drivers to pass.

"General Chiarelli made a big difference." Winski said. "He meant it when he said stop being so quick on the trigger. If you shoot and make a mess, you're

strengthening the insurgency. If we make a mistake, we stop and make restitution. I have one rule for all my drivers: don't be a prick on the road."

We stopped in an isolated town called Narhawan on the eastern edge of Baghdad and chatted with 1Lt Jason Miller, who had a platoon among the 140,000 residents.

"In February, some Sunnis in police uniforms set up a fake check point near the cement factory," Miller said. "Inside 20 minutes they had stopped 45 Shiites from here, including the mayor. Massacred them all. So JAM came as protectors. Now they run this place and the police do as they're told. We met with JAM. Our deal is - if they stay cool, we stay cool. It's worked out so far."

We walked over to the taxi stand. The drivers were sullen, willing to talk but resentful. No one needs a ride anywhere because everyone's too scared to leave home. The police are too weak, they said. We need to keep JAM here in case the Sunnis come back. Yes, you Americans have a platoon here, but so what? You've been here three years and have done nothing.

In ten months, the 1st Battalion had detained, interrogated several hundred, sent to higher 130 alleged insurgents, of whom 86 received prison sentences. Most frustrating were the six Shiites the battalion stopped after a chase, found weapons in the car and blood on the hands, with a Sunni body leaking out down the street -- and a judge let all six walk free.

The battalion had arrested a deputy to Sadr, Ali Sharhan, whom they found hiding on the 17th floor of the Sheik Adnon Hospital. Acting on a tip, they returned to the hospital the next week and arrested five men who were taking Sunnis from the hospital and executing them. A judge returned all five to duty and the hospital administrator accused the Americans of opening the combination to a safe and stealing a payroll of $80,000.

On 14 September, acting on another tip, Winski took a force at midnight into a Shiite slum district to arrest Abu Sayef, a JAM leader holding a meeting at a mosque. The raid force of about eight humvees was proceeding south down dirt streets when the JAM guards opened fire. Dozens of families sleeping on roofs scurried for safety as the cavalry troops engaged fleeting targets. Sayef escaped.

On 16 September, the leader returned to the neighborhood, selected eleven passersby at random and executed them on the street as a warning not to betray him. Winski was furious. It was maddening how time and again Sunnis and Shiites alike accepted being slaughtered, while onlookers never betrayed the killers.

"Our information didn't come from a local source," Winski told me. "Sayef butchered those poor people for no reason, no reason at all."

Winski was showing me his around his area when he was told of a shooting at a nearby chicken farm. We arrived as the police were dragging aside two bodies, the dirt sopping up the blood. A tall Iraqi in a blue T-shirt was angrily pointing down a dirt road shaded by bright green bamboo thickets.

"The killers ran down there," he said through an interpreter.

An old truck with a few squawking chickens in small cages was mired in a pothole. As the dead men were purchasing the chickens, two men had walked up, gunned them down and tried to steal the truck. The farm was on the border between Shiite and Sunni communities. Were the slain men Shiite or Sunni? No one seemed to know. "We need air support to go down that road," the Iraqi police major said. "Very dangerous."

Winski looked at the two dozen policemen. "I'll go first," he sad. "You follow." We jounced down the road past abandoned, burnt-out farms.

"Mahdi ReMax," Winski said. "The Mahdi Army burns a farm about every two days. A few days ago, the Sunnis ambushed the police on this road. Torched six vehicles and killed two cops. They think the police are tipping off JAM."

When we came out at the river, two men darted from a rundown house into a dense palm grove. Behind the house were open chicken coops. Ten minutes later, the police arrived and a hapless teen-aged boy stopped to watch. When the police grabbed him and slapped him around, Winski intervened. The boy begged to be let go.

"They'll cut my head off if I talk," he whimpered as the police put him into a pickup.

"Poor kid," Winski said to me. "The killers will think he turned them in. He can't come back here."

The police whooped in a brief victory dance before driving off with the sobbing boy and the bodies of two strangers killed for a few chickens.

After ten months in Baghdad, Winski believed his battalion had attrited some, but not eliminated the Sunni insurgents who attacked with IEDs. More disturbing to him were the gradual inroads of Shiite militia gangs that quickly brought the local Shiite neighborhoods into line by killing a few and promising "protection" to the rest, then launching sporadic raids into Sunni areas, like the isolated farms along the river. What angered Winski was the coarse indifference to life, killing for a couple of chickens.

The Sunnis no longer went to the market to sell their produce, as the sectarian poison slowly seeped into the larger Shiite community. When Winski's battalion left in late 2006, the JAM drove all Sunnis out of the area.

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At the end of 2006, in both Anbar and Baghdad, the most remedial defect going unaddressed was the catch and release program. Over 80% of Sunni insurgents or Shiite militia detained by American or Iraqi soldiers were eventually set free.

After the Abu Ghraib scandal, Iraqi and American leaders viewed prisoners as a public relations disaster and put in place review procedures favorable to the insurgents. Every detainee required two arrest affidavits by American soldiers, plus physical evidence and pictures of the "crime" scene. The brigade had to review the evidence sent by battalion. If a detainee were still held, an Iraqi-American committee reviewed the evidence a third time. The few remaining detainees eventually went before an Iraqi judge for a fourth review and trial. "Too many Iraqi judges let the terrorists go free," Casey told me.

Thus, insurgents and death squads enjoy the best of both worlds. By posing as civilians, they are hard to identify and run a low risk of being detained. If captured, they are guaranteed civil rights denied enemy soldiers in uniform, who are held until the end of hostilities. The American Constitution provides for the suspension of habeas corpus in the event of rebellion. During the Civil War, President Lincoln suspended habeas corpus. "I know of no initiative to suspend habeas corpus in Iraq," Casey told me.

In this war, the moral is to the physical as 20 to one. With the moral tide running against them, American military leaders must execute a flawless plan to build the Iraqi security forces into the strongest tribe in a tribal society. Tough police chiefs, backed by American combat advisers, can tip the scales -- provided their own ministries back them. A dramatic increase, however, in American advisers cannot prevent the dissolution of Iraq, if the Iraqi government - and the American command - refuses to arrest and imprison the rebels and killers in adequate numbers.

By historical standards, Iraq should have in prison at least 80,000 insurgents, plus 20,000 murderers. The actual prison population is under 16,000, with the coalition holding another 14,000.

In New York City, 40,000 police made 120,000 arrests in a year, of which 62,000 went to prison. Applying that rate, the 200,000 police in murder-wracked Iraq would send 300,000 to prison. Instead, in one week in November, the Iraqi Criminal Court recorded 13 convictions, on pace to imprison 650 insurgents and murderers in a year.

"I'll put it to you straight," Ralph Morten, a chief detective on leave from the LAPD to train Marines in Iraq, told me. "No police chief in the States could keep his job with the poor arrest rates in this country."